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SHAKSPERE
AS A PLAYWRIGHT

SHAKSPERE AS A PLAYWRIGHT

BY

BRANDER MATTHEWS

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TO

MY COLLEAGUES

OF THE

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

IN GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF

FRIENDLY COUNSEL

PREFATORY NOTE

A FEW years ago a French critic pointed out the significant fact that the British had chosen to consider Shakspere chiefly as a poet, whereas the French had preferred to treat him rather as a psychologist and the Germans as a philosopher. There could be no stronger testimony to the diversity of Shakspere's appeal than this divergence of approach. And yet, poet as he was, and philosopher and psychologist, Shakspere was first of all a playwright, composing plays to be performed by actors in a theater before an audience. He has been superabundantly discussed as a poet, as a philosopher, and as a psychologist; but he has been less adequately criticized as a playwright, pure and simple. Perhaps it is in the United States that this aspect of his genius has been most often considered.

This book has been born of the belief that—thanks to the untiring investigations of devoted scholars—our stock of information about the Elizabethan playhouse has now made it possible to relate Shakspere more intimately to the theater of his own time, to the actors of his own company, and to the contemporary spectators for whose pleasure he composed his plays. An attempt has here been made to disentangle the fundamental principles which guided him in the construction of his successive plays, to analyze the elements of his craftsmanship, and to trace the

development of his dramaturgic technic. To spy out all the secrets of Shakspere's art might demand an insight equal to his own; yet it ought not to be difficult to discover the more obvious causes for the superlative success of his greater plays, in which he handled his material with superb mastery,—and also to perceive now and again one or another of the reasons for the comparative ineffectiveness of the less interesting pieces.

In this study I have sought to apply to Shakspere the method of analysis already employed in my critical biography of Molière. Unfortunately, we know far less about the facts of Shakspere's life than we do about the details of Molière's career; yet I believe that it is feasible to trace the growth of the English poet as a practical playwright almost as clearly as we can follow the equally important evolution of the French dramatist. And as this book is designed to deal with Shakspere only as a playwright, attention has here been focused on the plays which are most instructive as plays, rather than on those which display other qualities of his genius more splendidly. For example, the 'Comedy of Errors,' a comparatively empty play of his immaturity, is in a sense more significant than 'King Lear,' one of the noblest monuments of his loftiest period, because the 'Comedy of Errors' discloses his early conquest of the art of construction, whereas 'King Lear,' however appealing it may be in its poetry, is less rigorous in its plotting.

Where I have been conscious of indebtedness to any specific predecessor in the discussion of Shakspere's stagecraft, I have declared my obligation, and I have been able

often to quote the exact words which I have found suggestive. But the mass of Shaksperian criticism is now so overwhelming, that I cannot hope to have given credit to all those by whose labors I have profited; yet I should be remiss if I did not acknowledge a special debt to Professor Thomas R. Lounsbury, to Professor A. C. Bradley, and to M. Jules Jusserand.

BRANDER MATTHEWS.

April 23, 1913.

NOTE.—The author desires also to express here his obligation to Mr. E. Hamilton Bell for the care and the skill with which the maps of Shakspere's London have been prepared.

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On both of which are shown the localities with which history or tradition has connected Shakspere.

At end of volume

SHAKSPERE AS A PLAYWRIGHT

CHAPTER I

SHAKSPERE'S LIFE

I

This book is not a biography of Shakspere; it is a study of his stage-craft. The story of his life has been set forth again and again by ambitious chroniclers; and every possible source of information seems to have been searched for new light on his family, on his friends, on his business associates and on the events of his own career. Probably we are now in possession of more information about him than about any other man of his time who did not take part in public affairs. And yet there is still validity in the often quoted assertion of Steevens: "All that is known with any degree of certainty concerning Shakspere is, that he was born at Stratford-on-Avon, married and had children there; went to London where he commenced actor and wrote poems and plays; returned to Stratford, made his will, died, and was buried." The diligent investigations of a century have delighted us with no really vital fact to add to those thus summarily stated. Research has provided us with a host of welcome supplements to this fundamental knowledge and it has enabled us to reconstruct a richer background for Shakspere; but the most significant facts are still those that Steevens tersely stated.

We are still without any document as detailed and as trustworthy as the invaluable register which was kept by an actor of Molière's company and which records for us the exact sequence of his plays and the daily receipts at the doors of his theater.

On the other hand, the patient seekers after fresh information have not been more resolute or more indefatigable than the devisers of new theories, ready to welcome a novel fancy in default of a novel fact. And as a result of this riot of assumption it is not easy nowadays to disentangle the solidly ascertained truth about Shakspere from the wind-blown suppositions with which his biography has been inflated. Not a few of these ingenious conjectures may be dismissed as patently absurd; but some of them are plausible and alluring. We are at liberty, if we choose, to accept them as highly probable; yet ought we always to distinguish them sharply from the indisputable facts. However interesting and illuminating they may appear, they remain conjectures only; and as conjectures only they must be set aside when we are bent on resting solely upon the secure basis of the incontrovertible. This must serve as the excuse for a compact narrative of Shakspere's life in so far as that is needful here in explanation of his development as a dramatist.

William Shakspere was born at Stratford-on-Avon in April, 1564. His father, John Shakspere, was one of the leading citizens of the little town at the time of the poet's birth, serving as an alderman in 1565 and as a bailiff in 1568. John Shakspere knew how to write, although often he preferred to make his mark; his wife, Mary Arden, although she came of a well-to-do family, could not even sign her name. As the son of a freeholder

William Shakspere had a right to enter the Grammar School at the age of seven. It is not certain, but it is highly probable that he was sent to this school. Yet it is unlikely that he remained there to the end, since he could enter only in 1571 and his father's affairs became involved shortly thereafter; in 1574 John Shakspere was unable to pay a town-contribution, and he also began to mortgage his property. It was in 1575, when Shakspere was eleven, that Queen Elizabeth visited Kenilworth. And it was in 1582, when Shakspere was only eighteen, that he married Anne Hathaway, eight years his senior. This was in November; and in May of the following year his first child, Susanna, was baptized. Before he was twenty-one, twins were born to him, Hamnet and Judith.

For the next eight years of Shakspere's life we have very few facts. A company of actors came to Stratford in 1587; and by 1592 Shakspere had already won a position in London as an actor and an adapter of plays. In 1593 he published 'Venus and Adonis'; and at the end of this year he appeared before the queen as a member of Burbage's company. In 1594 he published his 'Lucrece,' which he dedicated to the Earl of Southampton, to whom he had already inscribed 'Venus and Adonis.' His version of 'Titus Andronicus' must have been produced not later than this year, since it was then printed in quarto. Quarto editions of other of his plays were frequently issued after 1597; and we know he had been constantly engaged in playwriting, because in 1598 Meres gives us the names of six comedies and of six tragedies already performed. That Shakspere was then doing well as an author, as an actor, and probably also as a shareholder in the theater, is a fair inference from the fact that in 1596 his father applied for a grant of arms and

that in 1597 Shakspere purchased New Place at Stratford. His wife and his children continued to reside in the town where he had been born; and he seems to have been looking forward already to the day when he could return thither. His only son, Hamnet, died in 1596, the year before he bought New Place.

In 1598–9 the Theater in which Burbage's company acted, was pulled down and a new playhouse, the Globe, was built on Bankside. Shakspere was then a sharer in the management. It was in the ensuing years that he produced his greatest plays, first the most delightful of his comedies, 'Much Ado about Nothing,' 'As You Like It' and 'Twelfth Night,' and a few years later, the most searching of his tragedies, 'Hamlet,' 'Othello' and 'Macbeth.' When James I took the throne in 1603 the company of which Shakspere was a member, was licensed as the King's Players. In 1605 Shakspere, who is earlier on record as a purchaser of real estate in London and as a lender of money, was rich enough to buy half the lease of the Stratford tithes for a term of years. In 1607 his elder daughter was married; and in the same year his younger brother, Edmund, also an actor, died. The next year a grandchild was born to him. Probably it was about this time, when he was forty-five, that he gave up acting and retired to Stratford for the rest of his life. We do not know the year when he first went up to London and we do not know the year when he finally left it. It is likely that while he was living in London he made occasional visits to Stratford; and it is certain that after he had retired to his native town he still took brief trips to the capital, where he owned property and where he had an interest in two theaters.

His 'Sonnets' were published in 1609, apparently with-

out his authority. Some of them, and perhaps all of them, had been written years before. In 1613 he increased his real-estate holdings in London. In that year also the Globe Theater was burnt down during a performance of 'Henry VIII.' In February, 1616, his younger daughter was married. In March of that year he executed his will; and on April twenty-third he died at Stratford, being buried two days later in the chancel of the church. He was just fifty-two years of age, having lived one year longer than the span of life allotted to Molière. At his death he had a fourteenth share in the Globe Theater, the house occupied by the company to which he had belonged and for which he had written all his plays,—except possibly one or two of his earliest adaptations. He owned a seventh share in the Blackfriars' Theater, which was also occupied by his company.

II

This is all we know about his life, little as it is; and the mystery of his genius is not revealed by these meager details. We know nothing about his education, about his position in his father's house, about his domestic relations, about his own family. All we have are the dates of his marriage, of the birth of his first child and of the twins later, of his only son's death, and of the successive weddings of his two daughters. Legal documents of one kind or another, which give us these facts, supply us also with a few more dates, interesting enough in themselves but not elucidating. Tradition, which is rarely trustworthy, has contributed not a little gossip—about his having in his youth taken part in a poaching adventure on the lands of a wealthy family near Strat-

ford, and about a carouse with Ben Jonson after his retirement to his native town.

But nothing has yet come to light to tell us how he spent the trying years in London, before he made a place for himself as actor and as author. Did he begin outside the theater by holding the horses of the gallants who mounted to the boxes? Or did he begin inside the theater in the humble office of call-boy? Did he serve an apprenticeship to a scrivener and so pick up a smattering of law-terms? How and when did he make the acquaintance of Southampton? And did that nobleman ever gratify him with the present of a large sum of money? Are the sonnets revelations of the poet's own experiences and was the dark story of intrigue that we may dimly make out in them a record of the poet's personal misadventures in love and in friendship? Or are the sonnets merely poetic experiments, in a manner then popular among the rimesters of the time literary exercises in which the poet was playing with the accepted themes borrowed by the Elizabethan sonneteers from the French and Italian lyrists?

As to each of these questions we have a right to our own opinion; and it must remain an opinion only, since there can be no certainty about it. In default of fact we are reduced to inference; and inference is as dangerous as it is attractive. Some things there are which we may accept as indisputable. However he may have won his way into the theater and in whatever capacity he may have begun his career in it, he soon established himself as a worthy member of the company, gaining admission after a while into the limited group of sharers, who may be considered as the associated managers of the theater. However he may have begun as a playwright, apparently

by patching up old pieces, he soon took courage to compose original plays; and he was industriously engaged in dramatic authorship for a score of years at least. Thirty-seven plays are now attributed to him, although his exact share in half a dozen of these is still a matter of debate. And we do not know the order in which his plays were written, no two investigators agreeing upon the strict sequence of their composition. Shakspere himself refrained from publishing even a single one of his plays; and no text can be accepted as representing his own manuscript.

One deduction from all the evidence may be taken as fully warranted. Shakspere had an unusual gift for friendship. He made friends early and he kept them late. He was a man whom other men liked and to whom they went for help. The dedications of 'Venus and Adonis' and 'Lucrece' to Southampton prove that a younger man of high rank had early admitted him to intimacy. Bequests in his own will and in the wills of his associates of the theater prove that his fellows held him in affectionate regard. The publication of his plays in folio, seven years after his death, by the pious care of two surviving comrades, proves that they lovingly cherished his memory. Ben Jonson's conversations with Drummond are evidence that Shakspere had been able to bind to him a poet as touchy and as self-valuing as the author of the 'Alchemist,' despite all their striking differences in character and in dramatic theory.

Apparently he was as free from affectation and pretense as was Molière, as friendly and companionable. He liked to mix with his fellow-men and to meet them affably, with no assumptions of superiority, no austerity of demeanor and no aloofness of manner. As

Molière used to foregather with Boileau and the rest at the Croix d'Or, so Shakspere frequented the Mermaid:—

> What things have we seen
> Done at the Mermaid! heard words that have been
> So nimble, and so full of subtle flame,
> As if that every one from whence they came
> Had meant to put his whole wit in a jest,
> And had resolved to live a fool the rest
> Of his dull life.

So Beaumont, in his poetical epistle to Jonson, recorded their meetings; and Fuller—writing, it must be admitted, nearly half a century after Shakspere's death—asserted that "many were the wit-combats betwixt him and Ben Jonson, which two I behold like a Spanish great Gallion and an English man of War: Master Jonson (like the former) was built far higher in learning, Solid, but Slow in his performances. Shakspere, with the English man of War, lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about, and take advantage of all winds, by the quickness of his Wit and Invention."

III

Fuller's assertion that Jonson was built far higher in learning is supported by Jonson's own remark that Shakspere had "small Latin and less Greek." This may be taken as an admission that Shakspere had some Greek and more Latin, even though his learning may have seemed but little to Jonson, who was himself a scholar of omnivorous reading and of indefatigable absorption. If Shakspere went to the Grammar School at Stratford, he might have acquired a smattering of Greek, although

there is scant evidence of this in any of his writings. And if he was able to attend the school for a term of years, he would have been well grounded in Latin. He quotes from the Latin grammar in use at that time; but he may never have gained more than the ability to pick out the meaning of a Latin play. Perhaps, indeed, he had not attained even to this, since he seems to have preferred to make use of an English translation.

Whether or not Shakspere went to the Grammar School at Stratford, he never had that solid training in philosophy which Molière received at the Collège de Clermont. And he never approached the vast erudition for which Jonson unceasingly toiled. What more especially separates Shakspere from Jonson is that he never takes what may be called the scholar's point of view, an attitude which is habitual to the younger man. Jonson reveals not only the scholar's satisfaction in being supported by chapter and verse but also the scholar's abhorrence of careless inaccuracy. Shakspere is consistently careless and inaccurate in matters of scholarship. He is reckless in a manner impossible to any one trained to tread the stony path of learning. He has no certain knowledge in geography, in history and in natural history; and he never thinks of taking any trouble to look things up and to get them right. He seems to be perfectly satisfied with what runs off his pen, confident that his audiences were little likely to be particular about trifles or to possess information he lacked himself.

He reveals a complacent ignorance of the geography of Italy in the 'Two Gentlemen of Verona' and in the 'Tempest,' of that of Bohemia in 'Twelfth Night,' of that of Scotland in 'Macbeth' and of that of Denmark in 'Hamlet.' He never feels constrained to follow the

strict historical sequence of the events which he might carry over from the chroniclers and the historians; he takes the liberty of transposing episodes at will to suit his own purpose. He conforms to the medieval habit of assuming that the manners and customs of the past differed but little or not at all from the manners and customs of the present; and as a result of this, he is abundant in flagrant anachronisms. He bestows nunneries and abbesses on the ancient Greeks; and he lends clocks and cannon to the ancient Romans. He never thinks of correcting North's blundering Decius for Plutarch's Decimus Brutus, or even North's impossible Calphurnia for Calpurnia. He accepts an inaccurate pronunciation of Andronicus, wresting it from that which it had in Rome.

He has been lavishly belauded for his delicate observation of nature and for his precise knowledge of the habits of plants; and it may be acknowledged that when he discourses of flowers and trees he is standing on solid ground, for he had kept his eyes open during his Warwickshire boyhood, as he kept them open also during his London manhood. But even if he may be generally exact in his references to the plants of his native county, he is often inexact in his reference to birds and beasts. He makes the singing nightingale a female, and he implies that the swan swims in salt water. He suggests that the cuckoo can bite off the head of the hedge sparrow. He asserts that the adder is deaf, that the mole is blind, and that the toad is venomous—errors due to the acceptance of traditional beliefs. He has no hesitation in availing himself of the so-called unnatural natural history, which was a medieval inheritance, and which had been popularized more recently by Lyly. He does not shrink from crediting the toad with a precious

jewel in his head or from bestowing upon the crocodile the faculty of hypocritic tears.

Very likely he knew better and these inaccuracies in botany and in zoology were due to his utilization of folk-beliefs, crystallized in earlier literature. Like the inaccuracies in geology and in chronology, they may be admitted frankly; and they need not be apologized for, since they are most of them of little importance. The dramatic poet is not called upon to possess the scientific accuracy of the college professor. But, trifles as they are, they indicate that Shakspere never attained to the high and severe standard of scholarship, a thing wholly foreign to his temperament. He is free from any taint of the pedantry which can be detected in both Bacon and Jonson. His schooling, inferior to theirs, is sufficient for him. His learning is not book-learning; it is derived from life itself. He may lack much that they know, but he knows much also that they could never acquire. "Men of genius," Brunetière declared when he was dealing with Balzac, "know many things without having studied them, and we who know these same things only because we have learned them—we insist that they must have studied just as we did."

Shakspere has not only the intuition, the insight and the imagination of the poet, he has also a personal power of sponge-like absorption, of acquiring all sorts of things from all sorts of people. Even if he never takes the scholar's point of view and even if he blunders carelessly in trivial details, he manages to accumulate abundant stores of information to sustain his later knowledge and to support his ultimate wisdom.

IV

One reason—indeed, probably the chief reason—for the paucity of our information about Shakspere's life, is that nobody then thought it necessary to keep a record of his sayings and doings, because nobody then suspected his supremacy. It would be pleasant for us to feel that his contemporaries recognized and appreciated his greatness; but it is a fact that they did not. And it would be unreasonable for us to blame them for not perceiving then what is so plain to us now. "Great men," Lecky has reminded us, "are like the great mountains which are surrounded by lower peaks that often obscure their grandeur and seem to a near observer to equal or even to overtop them. It is only when seen from far off that their true dimensions are fully realized, and they soar to heaven above all rivals."

Thus it was that Cervantes and Molière were not appreciated in their own lifetimes, popular as they were and warmly praised, even if not for the finer qualities that we now discover in their works. But Shakspere labored under a double disadvantage from which Cervantes and Molière were free. In the first place, his plays were not published for his contemporaries to read in the study; they were to be seen only on the stage; and in the second place, plays were not then held to be literature but rather a sort of ephemeral journalism. Such literary reputation as Shakspere achieved in his own lifetime was derived rather from his two poems than from his twoscore plays. Even to-day the literary critic is inclined to be skeptical as to the literary value of a play which he has seen only in the theater and which he has not been able

to consider carefully in the library. The drama and the "show-business" are still twins, as they always have been; and the show-business often has disreputable accompaniments which cannot but injuriously affect our opinion of the drama itself. Under the Tudors not a few of the circumstances of the theater were shocking to the Puritan, and abhorrent to men of intellectual and moral fastidiousness. Whatever the reason, there is no doubt of the fact that the stage-plays, which we now hold to be the chief glories of Elizabeth's reign, were treated with surprising contempt, expressed as frankly in Sidney's 'Defence of Poesie' as in Hall's satires.

Even Shakspere's fellow-playwrights, who paid him the sincere compliment of imitation, did not perceive his triumphant superiority over all his rivals. They bestowed on him the same uncritical praise that they also lavished on his contemporaries, unsuspicious that he differed in kind as well as in degree. In fact, they often seem to hold him less important than certain of these contemporaries. As late as 1612 Webster praised Chapman and Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, each with an apt phrase of laudation, and then dismissed collectively "the right happy and copious industry" of Shakspere, Dekker and Heywood. Perhaps this is really more significant than the total omission of Shakspere's name from the "Address to the Reader" which Shirley prefixed to the folio of Beaumont and Fletcher in 1647. Yet attention may be drawn to Shirley's assertion that to mention Beaumont and Fletcher is "to draw a cloud upon all former names," since the book containing their plays is, "without flattery, the greatest monument of the scene that time and humanity have produced."

To us Shakspere is the mighty creator of character and

the marvelous reader of the human soul; but to the men of his own time, even to the contemporary dramatists who had most occasion to be familiar with his works, he is primarily a story-teller, who contrived interesting dramas of a varied ingenuity and of an approved popularity, an honest craftsman to be praised for his "copious industry." There is no jealousy in this, for his contemporaries had little suspicion of any superiority to excite their envy. Indeed, the tone of the allusions to him during his lifetime and in the years immediately following his death—and these allusions have been sedulously sought for and carefully set in order—is almost uniformly complimentary. The praise which is scant for the playwright, although not infrequent for the poet, is cordial and abundant for the man. There are good words in plenty for Shakspere's courtesy and friendliness; and there are fine words for his narrative poems; but there are few really appreciative words for his plays.

When his tragedies and comedies come in for commendation, as they do occasionally, the praise is perfunctory, or at best undiscriminating. For published laudation founded upon a more genuine appreciation of Shakspere's abiding qualities we must wait for Ben Jonson's verses prefixed to the folio of 1623. And even that noble and heartfelt recognition conforms to the current convention of vague and extravagant eulogy, which was then held to be proper in dedicatory verse. Jonson sets Shakspere above Lyly and Kyd and Marlowe, and puts him by the side of Æschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. But this is quite the sort of thing that was then expected of the poet who praised a dead friend in the forefront of the dead friend's works. Loftily phrased as is Jonson's commendation, it is deficient in critical specifications;

it is eulogy at large; it singles out few of the qualities for which we now hold Shakspere in highest esteem. It is only fair to conclude that if Ben Jonson, writing within seven years after Shakspere's death, had not yet discovered the secure basis of Shakspere's future fame, this foundation was then hidden from contemporaries less gifted in criticism than Jonson himself.

CHAPTER II

SHAKSPERE'S THEATER

I

It was at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century that the writer of one of the chapters devoted to Shakspere in the composite 'Cambridge History of English Literature' risked a remark which must have struck with amazement every student of the dramatic art. "It is, of course, quite true that all of Shakspere's plays were written to be acted; but it may be questioned whether this is much more than an accident arising from the fact that the drama was the dominant form of literature." The critic then admits that it was "a happy accident" —not because it gave occasion for the revelation of Shakspere's power as a dramatist able to handle at once character and situation as only the dramatist can—but "because of the unique opportunity which this form gives of employing both the vehicles of poetry and of prose."

This astounding assertion discloses a total inability to understand the special province of the drama; and it reveals a blank incapacity to perceive the lofty position which Shakspere holds as a dramatic poet. Yet it is only the reduction to the absurd of an opinion hinted at by Johnson in the eighteenth century and held by Lamb in the nineteenth. "It may seem a paradox," Lamb declared, "but I cannot help being of opinion that the plays of Shakspere are less calculated for performance on

a stage than those of almost any other dramatist whatever. Their distinguished excellence is a reason that they should be so. There is so much in them which comes not under the province of acting, and with which eye and tone and gesture have nothing to do."

It is true, of course, that every great dramatist may lose something of his subtlety and of his suggestion when his works are seen only on the stage, in consequence of the possible inadequacy of any particular performance, or even in consequence of the necessary swiftness of representation in the theater. There is more depth and more breadth in the masterpieces of Sophocles, of Shakspere and of Molière than can be apprehended at once when the plays are performed before us. It may even be acknowledged frankly that there is a possible diminution of stature and even a vague vulgarization, almost unavoidable in any bodying forth by flesh-and-blood actors of the characters created by the poet's towering imagination. But the gain is far greater than the loss. The plays of Shakspere, like those of Sophocles and of Molière, were strictly "calculated for the stage"; and it is only on the stage itself that they disclose their essential dramatic quality. They are designed with an eye single to actual performance; and it is in this actual performance that they most clearly reveal themselves to be truly dramatic. Sophocles could not publish his plays; Shakspere did not publish his; and Molière expressed his willingness to keep his unpublished, preferring to rely rather on the effect they had produced in the theater.

The late Professor Jebb dwelt on the enlarging effect of seeing the 'Œdipus' of Sophocles acted; the visual and the auditory impressions received in the theater broadened and strengthened the opinions derived from analysis in the

library; and the stately tragedy took on an unsuspected amplitude when it was represented by living performers, as if it had waked itself to life. Similar testimony has been proffered by all the other students of classical literature who have had the profitable pleasure of beholding a Greek tragedy or a Latin comedy actually performed. No doubt there may be delicacies of expression, sublimities of poetry, subtleties of psychologic analysis, which evade observation in the representation; but the massive movement of Greek tragedy and the ingenious rapidity of Latin comedy are exposed completely only when the plays are witnessed in the theater. What is true of the 'Œdipus' of Sophocles is true also of the 'Ghosts' of Ibsen, which lays bare its secret sources of power only when its appalling story is unrolled slowly before us on the stage.

To judge a play from the printed page alone is like trying to estimate the value of a picture solely from a photograph of it. The full color is visible only in the playhouse, which is the gallery where its author designed it to be exhibited. Shakspere is one of the greatest of poets, and he can be, on occasion, one of the greatest of playwrights. Being a great poet, he sometimes transcends the narrower limits of the theater. But he "calculated" his plays for the stage, and it is no "accident" that all of them "were written to be acted." In his day the drama was "the dominant form of literature"; and this was fortunate for him, since he was a born dramatist, and since the drama is the only form in which his full genius could find ample and adequate expression. Like all other dramatists he wrote his plays to be performed by actors in a theater and before an audience. Indeed, we may be more precise and insist that Shak-

spere wrote nearly all his plays to be performed by one particular group of actors, that to which he belonged; in one particular theater, that of which he was one of the managers; before one particular audience, that which was composed of the Londoners who were his compatriots and his contemporaries and whose opinions and sentiments he shared.

II

It is one of Bacon's wise remarks that truth comes out of error much more rapidly than it comes out of confusion. When we try to call up a picture of the specific Elizabethan playhouse for which Shakspere composed his plays, we have before us a dense fog of error and confusion. The error is due largely to our insufficient information; and the confusion is a natural result of earlier efforts to interpret information far less sufficient than that which we now possess. The conditions of a theatrical performance in the sixteenth century were not those of the eighteenth century, when the earlier attempts were made to elucidate Shakspere's works, although the first editors seem not to have suspected that the Elizabethan playwrights were unable to indicate a change of place by the easy eighteenth-century device of shifting the scenery, running on a pair of flats and running them off again as often as might be useful. And the conditions of the twentieth century differ widely from those of the eighteenth. In our theater to-day we see Shakspere's plays necessarily modified and even mangled to fit them to the picture-frame stage of our modern playhouses, and we read them in the library in editions modified and even mangled to adjust them to the suppositions of

editors familiar only with the post-Restoration methods of performance.

The result of this is that we in the twentieth century have had our view of the actual theater of the sixteenth century obscured by the mistaken guesses of the eighteenth century editors. We have been taught to suppose that Shakspere chopped up his plays into a tumultuous sequence of changing scenes. But it is more than doubtful whether he himself conceived any of his plays (except possibly half a dozen) in the five-act form; and it is certain that he did not himself imagine them as separated into a host of episodes, each of which took place in a separate spot. In the folio of 1623, which seems to be the earliest text derived from Shakspere's own manuscripts, only seventeen out of thirty-seven plays are divided into five acts; and in no one of the quartos published in his lifetime, and conforming to the actual performance more or less closely, is there warrant for any splitting up of the play into a heterogeny of scenes such as annoys us in almost every modern edition. For this division into acts and this subdivision into scenes we are indebted to the mistaken zeal of Rowe. He it was who is responsible for the needless absurdity of suggesting that successive episodes of the fifth act of 'Antony and Cleopatra' are shown in a "room in the palace" and in "another room in the palace," and that the action of the middle acts of 'As You Like It' shifts uselessly from a part of the Forest of Arden to "another part of the forest."

The cause of Rowe's error must be sought in the fact that he looked back to the stage of the sixteenth century and interpreted it by means of the methods of the stage of the eighteenth century—an attitude which could not

fail to cause misunderstanding. We can attain to a satisfactory knowledge of the Elizabethan theater only when we renounce all vain effort to look back and when we do our best to look forward—when we endeavor to interpret the stage of the sixteenth century by means of the methods of the stage of the fourteenth century. It was from the volunteer playwrights of the Middle Ages that the professional playwrights of Elizabeth's reign had inherited their traditions. The drama of the sixteenth century is in many of its aspects far closer to the drama of the fourteenth century than it is to the drama of the eighteenth century. After the Restoration, when the English drama had come under the influence of Molière, it was almost modern in its methods, because it was adjusted to a theater which was almost modern in its conditions; but under Elizabeth and James the English drama was almost medieval, because it was adjusted to a theater which was still semi-medieval, to say the least. It is therefore only by giving up all prejudices derived from our modern playhouse, with its picture-frame stage, and by trying to trace the steady development of the platform-stage of the Middle Ages down to its inclusion in the half-roofed playhouse of Elizabeth, that we can correct error and avoid confusion.

The development of the drama in the Middle Ages may be divided into three periods. It had its source in the desire of the clergy to make visible to their ignorant congregations the most significant episodes of the gospel story. It was a direct outgrowth of the attempt to show in action in the church, as part of the service, the salient passages of the Scripture narrative as the reading of that had been appointed for certain days of the Christian year. At first the manger was set up in the chancel

and the Resurrection was exemplified near the crypt; a little later a reserved space was set apart for Herod's throne, and other reserved spaces for other indications of specific localities. The congregation filled the church, and in the midst of them the performers moved to and fro, as the sequence of events might require, entering at one door and going out at another, passing from the manger to the tomb and to the other "stations" (as the reserved spaces are called which indicated a specific place). These stations were scattered through the church, each being in that part of the edifice which was best suited for it. Therefore the action took place on a neutral ground—that is, anywhere in the midst of the massed spectators, who broke their ranks to allow the performers to pass from one part of the church to another.

When the mystery was full-grown, it became too cumbersome for the church; and in time it was thrust out to be taken over by laymen, who substituted the vernacular of the people for the Latin of the priests. But in this second period there were no changes of method, except those which were imposed by adjustment to the novel conditions of representation outdoors. The performance took place in the open street and in the midst of the crowd surrounding the stations, which were either platforms or floats (called "pageants"). The acting took place on a neutral ground—that is, anywhere, now in the highway and now on one or another of the pageants, of which there were sometimes two for a single episode. In the course of years the mystery, which was the Bible-story in dialogue and in action, suggested the dramatization of saints' lives (which were called miracle-plays) and of allegories (which were called moralities). The comic element, which had been introduced early into the myster-

ies, was amplified in the miracle-plays, and especially in the moralities, the Vice being the accepted name for the chief humorous character. In this second period of the medieval drama the actors were still amateurs, craftsmen belonging to the various trade gilds.

Then in the early years of the Renascence, while the gilds still gave their performances—which survived to the end of the Tudor rule—small companies of strolling actors came into existence, professionals, at last, however crude their performance might be. Their repertory consisted at first of scenes from the mysteries and miracle-plays, and of moralities at once didactic and comic. Sooner or later, they applied the method of the dramatized gospel story and saint's life to historic narratives and even to popular fiction. They presented the life of a hero, setting forth all the striking events in his career, without artistic selection and without artistic compression. They were still representing a story in dialogue and in action for the benefit of those who could not read. Their methods were essentially those which had been in use in the church centuries earlier; and when they acted in the open fields they set up as many stations as they might need to indicate special places; but most of the acting was done on a neutral ground in the midst of the spectators, and the scene might be supposed to be anywhere, since often there was no indication of locality even in the dialogue—unless this was imperatively demanded by some circumstances of the story.

III

Out of these little bands of strollers grew the companies of actors whom we find plying their trade under the Tudors. They were sometimes very few in number, perhaps a scant half-dozen, like the Players welcomed to Elsinore by Hamlet. They were allowed to travel through England only when they were able to claim the protection of some great nobleman. They called themselves the Admiral's men or the Chamberlain's men, as the case might be. They acted wherever they could, in the baronial hall or in the town hall, on the village green or in the courtyard of the city inn. The English inn was then often a hollow square with galleries running around inside; and of all the places where the strolling actors performed the inn yard was the most convenient for their purpose. They set up their rude platform at the back and hung a curtain or two from the edge of the gallery above; the commoner sort of spectators stood all around this platform, in the open air, while any ladies and gentlemen who might be tempted to see the performance took rooms in the inn and sat out on the galleries which looked down on the yard.

As certain of the strolling companies grew in numbers and in repute they were enabled to increase their repertory. Plays were written for them, providing parts specially suited to their leading actors. They still traveled to the provincial towns; but they naturally preferred to appear in the capital as frequently as possible. London had the largest floating population and the most commodious inn yards. But the performances in the inns often attracted the least desirable elements of the

city; and many of the magistrates of London were Puritans, who had no relish for any form of amusement and who had a special distaste for the stage. These officials sought at first to restrict, and at last to interdict the strolling companies from performing in any inn within the limits of the city of London. The actors appealed for support to their avowed protectors, the noblemen whose servants they were, and to the officers of the court, who were never in sympathy with the Puritans. In time, however, the authorities of the city made the situation so difficult that the actors resolved to be independent. They erected playhouses for themselves just outside the city limits, and therefore beyond the jurisdiction of the magistrates.

In 1576 James Burbage built the Theater in the grounds of the suppressed monastery of Holywell, near Finsbury Fields, in the parish of Shoreditch. Although this new playhouse, the first to be erected in England, was not actually in the city of London, it was convenient of access to the citizens. Its success was immediate; and in the same year or the next a second playhouse was built not far distant. And before the end of the sixteenth century at least half a dozen other playhouses had been erected, some of them in the opposite outskirts of the city in Southwark, on the other side of the Thames. In 1599 the original Theater was taken down and rebuilt on the Bankside as the Globe. The Londoners were thus provided with more playhouses than the inhabitants of any other European capital. Until 1629 Paris had only a single theater, the Hôtel de Bourgogne; and even when Molière died in 1673 there were only three (the companies of which were united in 1684 to form the Comédie-Francaise).

This multiplication of playhouses in the capital is only one proof of the extraordinary interest in dramatic performances which was then evident in England. There was acting everywhere—by the professional actors in London and in the chief towns, by rustic amateurs on the village greens, by the gilds at the annual festivals, by the choir-boys of the chapels, by the lawyers of the Inns of Court and by the ladies and gentlemen who were in attendance on the queen. And no one of her subjects was fonder of a play or of a mask or of any sort of spectacle than Elizabeth herself.

It was owing to this almost universal liking for the drama in all its aspects that the novel venture of erecting a special building for the performance of plays was successful from the start and that the example of Burbage was swiftly followed by others. One result of the action of the city magistrates in driving the actors outside of the legal boundaries of London was certainly unexpected by them. In spite of the fact that half a dozen London inns had been largely given up to acting, the performances of the strolling companies could hardly have been more than occasional and intermittent. But in the new playhouses the performances were regular and permanent; and this soon compelled the actors to enlarge their repertory. So long as they were strollers, staying in any one place for but a few performances, they needed only a few plays; but as soon as they were settled in a theater of their own, appealing always to the inhabitants of the same town, they were forced to bring out new plays in rapid succession, as the older pieces became too familiar to the limited number of possible spectators.

With the steady increase in the number of theaters in London, there was a corresponding increase in the de-

mand for new dramas. Plays of an enduring popularity were kept in the repertory, of course, to be performed as frequently as might be profitable. But new plays were needed every week or every fortnight by one theater or another. Some of these new pieces were put together by this or that actor in the theater itself; and others were improvised by the clever young fellows who came up to London from the universities. For threescore years before the closing of the theaters by the Puritans there was an incessant consumption of new plays; and in no period of the history of the drama has there ever been a more marvelous productivity. This was due directly to the building of the original Theater outside of the jurisdiction of the Lord Mayor of London. Perhaps, therefore, it is not too much to say that the Puritans' hostility to stage-plays was an exciting cause of the extraordinary outflowering of the English drama under Elizabeth.

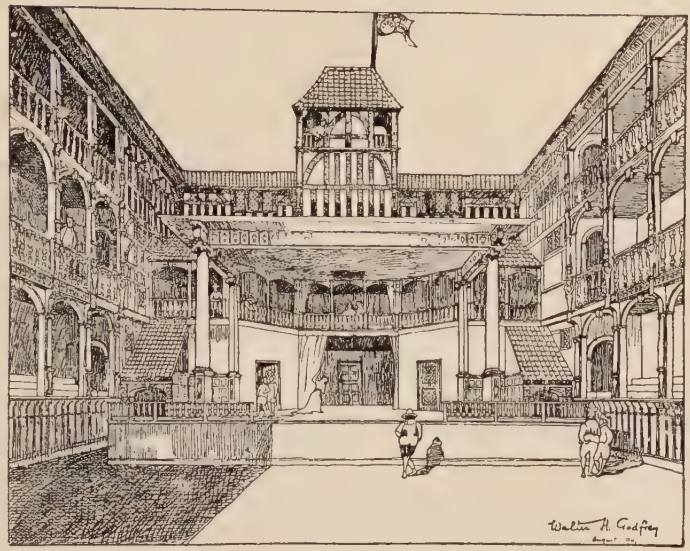
IV

When James Burbage built the original Theater he had no model. He knew nothing about the theaters of Greece and Rome; and even if he had been familiar with their construction they would have given him no guidance. What he wanted was to have a place as commodious for the performance of plays as the inn yard which he was abandoning; and the playhouse which he put up may be described as an inn yard—without the inn itself. He may have been influenced also more or less by the rings for bull-baiting and bear-baiting—circular wooden amphitheaters with an open arena. The later Fortune Theater was at first square, eighty feet wide and eighty feet long. But most of the earlier playhouses were

circular or polygonal. One or two galleries ran around the walls, to supply boxes for the more fastidious playgoers. The stage was a large platform jutting out into the middle of the open yard in which most of the spectators stood.

In the Fortune this stage was forty-three feet square, and it therefore occupied more than one-quarter of the area of the yard. "It was crossed at the back by a gallery, and from the edge of this gallery there hung tapestries, which screened off the rear part of the stage, and which could be parted or looped up to disclose an inner room. Apparently there were also two doors, one at the right and the other at the left. The gallery immediately over the stage was made to serve as a balcony or as the upper windows of a house whenever these might be called for by the action of the play. This part of the gallery may have been let as a box, when it was not actually required. There was a trap-door in the floor of the stage, to serve as a grave or a well, or to permit the rising of a ghost. Two columns on the stage supported a roof (called the "shadow" or the "heavens") which sheltered the actors from the weather. The galleries were also thatched or tiled, but the yard was open to the sky. In one of the later playhouses—that erected in the Bear Garden—the stage was on trestles, so that it could be taken away when the building was to serve for bull-baiting or bear-baiting." To us nowadays such a use seems a strange degradation for a temple of the drama; but we may remind ourselves that the theater of Dionysus in Athens was also the scene of the annual cock-fight.

It is evident that the Elizabethan playhouse differed widely from our comfortable modern theater. It had no roof, and the majority of the spectators had no seats. It



RESTORATION OF THE FORTUNE THEATER

By Walter H. Godfrey

had no artificial light and no curtain to separate the players from the playgoers. Indeed, the gallants and men about town sat on the stage itself, on the right and left sides of the platform, leaving an open space in the center for the actors; and a similar custom survived in the French theaters even a century later. Above all, the stage had no scenery, although it had elaborate properties of all kinds. Here, again, it followed the tradition of the medieval mystery; in the later Middle Ages, the stations (called pageants in England and *mansions* in France) were sometimes provided with small buildings or parts of buildings, a portico, for instance, serving to indicate a church or a temple. These summary representations of a special place were not the flimsy framework of a scene-painter, for the art of scene-painting did not come into existence until well on in the Renascence; they were the solid work of the house-carpenter adorned with appropriate colors by the house-painter. Nothing as substantial or as pretentious as this was possible to the strolling companies, acting in the inn yards; and their eager and tolerant audiences did not expect it. When these strolling companies settled down in playhouses of their own, neither the players nor the playgoers foresaw the possibility of such scenery as we demand to-day; and as they knew nothing of any such thing, they felt no need of it.

While the actors never thought of supplying a background of fixed scenery, they took pleasure in amusing the spectators with portable properties of many kinds; and here again they were in accord with the medieval tradition. They were ready enough to bring upon the stage any piece of furniture which might arouse the attention of the spectators; not merely chairs and thrones, but

objects of a far more complicated construction. In the 'Spanish Tragedy' they made use of an arbor with the body of a murdered man swinging in it. In the 'Faithful Sheperdess' they put a well-head over the trap-door, so that the Sullen Shepherd could let Amaryllis down into the well. In the 'Broken Heart' they had to provide a chair "with an engine"—that is to say, a chair fitted with springs so that iron clamps might suddenly seize the man who sat in it. In one play an apple-tree was planted on the stage, and in another a tent was pitched. A bed was sometimes thrust forward from behind the hanging tapestries, or these curtains might be parted to disclose a table set for a banquet or to reveal Friar Bacon seated in his cell and surrounded by his magical apparatus. In a list of the properties possessed by one company in 1598 we find even "1 Mouth of Hell," than which there could be no better proof of the intimate relation between the Elizabethan drama and the drama of the Middle Ages in which Hell-Mouth—represented by the yawning jaws of a fiery dragon—played a most prominent part.

Inadequate as this primitive playhouse may seem to us to-day, it was perfectly satisfactory to the main body of Elizabethan playgoers. It was better than what they had been used to in the makeshift performances of the inn yards. It was better than any theater in any other capital of Europe open to spectators who could pay their way in. It had distinct advantages over any playhouse of the same period in Madrid, when the Spanish stage was even more prolific than the English and when it was illumined by the genius of Lope de Vega and Calderón. Not only were there more theaters in London than in any other city, but these theaters were held to be better fitted for their special purpose and also handsomer.

This is the testimony of English travelers abroad and of foreign visitors to Great Britain.

V

It was for this theater, with its bare platform cluttered along its sides with seated spectators, with no curtain and no scenery, with its two doors and its gallery above, with its pendent tapestry at the back, that Shakspere composed his plays. He knew no other; and to the conditions of this theater all his histories, all his tragedies and all his comedies were adjusted. Like the playwrights of every other period, he made his profit out of the playhouse as he found it, never protesting against its limitations and always turning to advantage its possibilities. He accepted without hesitation the traditions established by his immediate predecessors; he walked in the path they had trodden for him; and he was content at first to do what they had done, even if he strove also to do it better. He never sought for overt originality of presentation, desiring rather to give the spectators who were in the habit of attending the theater the kind of play they were in the habit of enjoying there. Whatever these playgoers relished, that Shakspere was ready always to provide, even if he ventured in time to give them also and in addition what they could not so easily apprehend and appreciate.

The popular playwrights whom Shakspere imitated and emulated did not take the Aristotelian view that a play ought to present an action of a certain magnitude with an obvious unity of plot and with a beginning, a middle and an end. With the exception of Marlowe and Kyd, the earlier Elizabethan dramatists rarely sought to deal

with what Stevenson called the great passionate crises of existence "when duty and inclination come nobly to the grapple," the culminating moments of an irresistible struggle between irreconcilable desires. What they felt themselves called to set on the stage was the whole of their hero's career, with little selection or suppression, just as the whole of the gospel story had been represented in the mystery. Indeed, these early Elizabethan playwrights had almost the same purpose as the devout devisers of the first passion-play—they desired to show in dialogue and in action an interesting story, mainly for the benefit of spectators who could not read, who wanted to have the entire tale told to them just as it happened, and who had a patience as immense as their curiosity.

As the mystery had been loose in its construction or at least without any conscious unity of theme, so the popular play in London, when Shakspere came up from Stratford, was a haphazard sequence of casual episodes, some of them irrelevant and some of them incongruous. As the mystery had amused its admirers by the commingling of comic and serious scenes, so also the Elizabethan play unhesitatingly passed from high-pitched pathos to broad and hearty fun. As the mystery had been set off with all the spectacular effects possible in the Middle Ages, the dramatized narrative exhibited on the Elizabethan stage was accompanied by all the spectacular effects possible in the Elizabethan theater; and the playwright lost no opportunity to gladden the eyes of the men and boys who stood restless in the yard with processions and battles, and to delight their ears with songs and trumpets, bells and cannon.

As the characters of the medieval drama met and talked on a neutral ground, which might be anywhere,

going to and from the stations only when there was advantage in suggesting a special place, so the characters in the Elizabethan drama played their parts on a neutral ground, the bare stage itself, utilizing the space behind the arras or the gallery above only when these remoter places were necessary to the conduct of the story. Neither author nor spectator made any effort to localize the spot where two important characters came together to discuss their private plans, unless the circumstances of the plot required that this spot should be proclaimed. When the special place had to be indicated, this was done in the dialogue itself, and the audience was quick to take the hint. When no such necessity existed, the characters did not indicate it; and probably it was not indicated by any placard or by any scenic device.

The scene might be anywhere; and without warning it might shift to somewhere else. When it was necessary to the plot that the spectators should be notified of a change of place, the playwright did this frankly. In Middleton's 'Changeling,' for example, De Flores came out during an intermission and hung a rapier behind one of the doors, and then when the play was resumed he told Alonzo that the steps to the casemate were narrow and that they had best take off their swords. So they hang up their weapons; and then, as the stage-direction declares, they "Ex[eunt] at one door and enter at the other," thus indicating to the spectators that the stage was now supposed to be the casemate, and there De Flores, seizing the rapier he had concealed, kills Alonzo with it. In Greene's 'George-a-Greene,' a change of locality was apparently indicated by an even simpler method—by the actors taking a few steps together. The Shoemaker says, "Come, sir, will you go to the town's

end now, sir?" and Jenkin answers, "Ay, sir, come." It is evident that they then pace the stage, for Jenkin goes on, "Now we are at the town's end. What say you now?" But specific indications of locality like these were infrequent. They were rarely felt to be necessary or even useful. The spectators were ready to accept the stage as a neutral ground, where anybody might meet anybody else. Author and audience alike were interested in what the characters did and said and were, and not at all in where they were supposed to be.

To Sidney this was shocking, for he was familiar with the dramas of the Greeks and Romans, wherein there is little or no change of scene. "Now you shall have three ladies walk in to gather flowers, and then we must believe the stage to be a garden," Sidney complained. "By and by we hear news of a shipwreck in the same place, then we are to blame if we accept it not for a rock. Upon the back of that, out comes a hideous monster with fire and smoke, and then the miserable beholders are bound to take it for a cave." But the beholders were not miserable; so long as they beheld the hero saved from the wreck and victorious in his combat with the dragon, they were perfectly happy. And so long as he could thus make them happy, the playwright did not think of modifying his methods, unsatisfactory as they might be to Sidney, and strange as they may seem to us.

It is difficult for us to realize the large freedom the Elizabethan playwright possessed. His practice is wholly opposed to that of the modern dramatist, who has to adjust his pieces to the conditions of the picture-frame stage of to-day, very different from those of the platform-stage of Shakspere. The dramatist of the twentieth century thinks in terms of the theater of the twentieth cen-

tury; he conceives his play as a single compact action, with a beginning, a middle and an end; he composes it in a series of acts, each of which contains an essential portion of the plot and each of which is laid in its appropriate place, made visible by appropriate scenery and furniture. He is under pressure to make the action of his story clear, logical and progressive, and to exclude from it all that does not insist upon admission. But Shakspere felt no compulsion of this sort. He might intertwine as many separate stories as he chose; and he had no need to think where his successive episodes were supposed to take place, since he could not foresee the modern expectancy of scenery. He might call the place where he laid his story Ephesus or Athens, Bohemia or Illyria; none the less did he lay it not in any of these fabled places but frankly on the stage of his theater, rarely giving a thought to the indication of the locality where any one episode happened.

A careful reading of Shakspere's own text with his own stage-directions will reveal that this was always his practice. In the first act of 'Othello,' Brabantio enters "above," that is to say, he appears on the gallery over the back of the platform; and the modern editions identify this as then representing a window of Brabantio's house, but to Shakspere it was simply a useful element of his own stage. In the 'Taming of the Shrew,' when Sly is to be regaled with a play, the stage-direction is simply, "Enter the drunkard above," thus leaving the stage bare for the piece to be performed for his benefit. In the second act of the 'Midsummer Night's Dream,' although the scene may be supposed to be out in the wood, the stage-direction reads, "Enter Oberon at one door and Titania at another." Even more significant is Shak-

spere's utilization of the tapestry which hung from the edge of the gallery over the back of the stage. Hamlet thrusts through the arras and kills Polonius; and here it may be urged that tapestry is a fit adornment for the castle of Elsinore. But in the 'Merry Wives of Windsor,' Falstaff, when he is alarmed at the impending arrival of Ford, proposes to hide behind the arras. Ford was well-to-do and it is possible that his house was decked with expensive tapestry; but even if there had been arras in Ford's house it would not have profited the fat knight, since his protruding bulk would instantly have disclosed his presence behind the hangings—plain proof that Shakspere was thinking in terms of his own theater and not in terms of the place where his action was supposed to be.

It may be noted also that Shakspere made use of the medieval device of the stations, which brought together before the eyes of the spectators places actually far apart; in 'Richard III' the tents of the rival leaders, Richard and Richmond, are pitched on opposite sides of the stage. And the same convention, convenient if medieval, is utilized in other plays; to us it may seem out of nature, accustomed as we are to other conventions, but it was perfectly acceptable to Elizabethan playgoers, who were used to it and who were eager to hear the brag and bluff of the contending chiefs. Sometimes Shakspere wishes his audience to visualize a special spot and then he describes it picturesquely and forcibly, Dover cliff, for example, in 'King Lear' and Dunsinane Castle in 'Macbeth.' In the drama of the twentieth century description is out of place, since it is the duty of the scene-painter to supply the needed suggestion to the imagination; but in the drama of the sixteenth century the poet had to be his

own scene-painter. It is to the absence of scenery in the Elizabethan theater that we must ascribe the superb descriptions which delight us in Shakspere's plays. And it is an impossible task which is set the scene-painter now when he is called upon to rival the magic of Shakspere's style.

As there was no effort to provide the stage with appropriate scenery, so there was no attempt to dress the actors in costumes appropriate to the time and place of the play they were representing. The performers wore the most gorgeous clothes they could procure, regardless of the flagrant impropriety of attiring Hamlet and Macbeth and Julius Cæsar in the sumptuous apparel of Queen Elizabeth's court. In fact, the splendor of the men's clothes seems to have been almost as attractive in the sixteenth-century theaters of London as the richness of the women's clothes in the twentieth-century theaters of Paris.

CHAPTER III

SHAKSPERE AS REVISER AND AS IMITATOR

I

The mystery as it was evolved in the church has been aptly described as a "living picture-book," since "the people, ignorant of Latin, were to perceive by sight what was inaccessible to the ear." Therefore everything was shown in action, and there was as little narration as might be, because the words themselves were not understood by the spectators. The plays acted on the public stage under the Tudors retained the characteristics of the living picture-book, even though the language was no longer unintelligible. Most of the crude pieces which bridge the gap from the mystery to the chronicle-play are now lost; and yet it is not impossible to outline the dramatic development.

The mystery was an arrangement in dialogue and action of the gospel story with selected episodes from the Old Testament prefixed. The miracle was a similar presentation of the career of a saint or of the life of a layman whom the saint succored in the hour of need; and the method of performance was the same. This method was applied after a while to the lives of national heroes and later to leading characters in popular fiction; it was still the method of the living picture-book; and certain kinds of pictures proved to have the power of pleasing audiences. The chronicle-play, the dramatization of history, presented the salient figures in the annals of England;

and, like the mystery, it relieved its serious episodes with scenes of drollery, often having very little relation to the main theme of the play. Specimens of the pieces written by Shakspere's immediate predecessors have been preserved; and we can see for ourselves the kind of living picture-book which was interesting to the playgoers of London when Shakspere came up to the capital to earn his living as best he could. These immediate predecessors were his competitors; and in his friendly rivalry with them he availed himself of the devices they had found profitable.

He began, as indeed he had to begin, by imitating those whom he wished to emulate and whom he was soon to surpass. He started as a playwright by trying to do what they had already done and to give his audience the kind of pleasure to which it was accustomed. His beginnings were more than modest; they were as unpretending as possible. Neither he himself nor the associated actors who first permitted him to refashion for their use plays of an assured popularity which needed revision, could foresee or even suspect the marvelous genius he was soon to display. And in these earlier specimens of humble hack-work as the stock playwright of the company, it is absurd for us to expect to find the mighty gifts which were to be revealed in his maturity. His moving poetry, at one time instinct with lyric grace and at another rich with dramatic fervor, his power of projecting character and of piercing the soul of man at the moment of ultimate crisis, his wisdom, that is to say, his deep understanding of human conduct, and his final skill as a playwright, his power of so building up a story on the stage that we cannot choose but hear—these are the qualities which it would be idle to seek in the prentice tasks of his inexperienced youth.

Not only are these qualities of his riper mastery lacking in the earliest pieces to which his name is attached, but we fail to find in these plays any effort for originality, any striving for individuality, or any desire for self-expression. Probably at that period of his career he was not yet conscious of anything within him which demanded utterance; and at no time in his life did he ever search for originality. He was content to take the drama as he found it, even though he might be moved after a while to better its form and to fill that form with a meaning which it had never known before. He was willing at first to tread the trail his predecessors had blazed, even though he was to be encouraged later to push on to explorations of his own.

Every great artist, whatever his art, always begins by modest imitation of the men whom he finds at work, and from whom he has to acquire the traditions and the tricks of the trade, the technic of the calling; he starts where they had left off; and his earliest works, far from being masterpieces, are scarcely distinguishable from those of his elder rivals. He borrows their processes and assimilates their methods; and it is only by so doing that he is enabled to master the craft. Not until he has put himself abreast of the state of the art is he ready to go forward. The originality of every great artist is like the melancholy of Jaques—compounded of many simples. And the great artist is also strangely susceptible to later influences; even in the full flower of his expansion he is swift to feel the pressure of changing taste or the stimulus of a rival's success. Shakspere himself was led by the public liking for Beaumont and Fletcher to compose dramatic-romances akin to theirs; and this was very late in his career, after he had asserted his own individuality

in his major masterpieces. There is no need for surprise that in his impressionable youth he echoed Marlowe's mighty line and followed in the bloody footstep of Kyd.

II

The exact sequence in which Shakspere originally brought out the plays collected in the First Folio cannot be declared with authority, in default of the precise date when each of them was first acted. Ingenious methods of investigation and tireless industry in research have made it possible to indicate approximately the year when each of them was probably produced on the stage. There is substantial agreement among the scholars who have investigated these problems that 'Titus Andronicus' and the three parts of 'Henry VI' were put into Shakspere's hands for revision very early in his career as a playwright and probably before he had ventured upon original authorship. These plays stand in a peculiar position to the rest of his works. Not only are the dates of their production uncertain, but so also is Shakspere's own relation to them. We do not know just what share he had in these plays as we find them in the First Folio. They disclose undoubted traces of his handiwork, even if these indications are not many. On the other hand, these plays are plainly not wholly Shakspere's. They are not his general imitation of a predecessor's work; they are rather his revision of specific plays by one or more of these predecessors. Such interest as they have is due almost solely to the fact that they contain more or less of Shakspere's writing; but they are nowhere stamped with his trademark. As they reveal very few of his significant characteristics, they add little or nothing to his fame.

The three parts of 'Henry VI' have been called "a historical novel of the best type with the joy of verse added." And this may be admitted, as the utmost that can be said for the triplicate piece, only if we have in our minds no standard of unity for the historical novel. 'Henry VI' is a panorama rather than a play. It is only a sequence of straggling scenes, with no architecture of plot, with no dominating figure to focus our interest, with little intensity of will in the characters—a chance medley of independent episodes with no controlling purpose. Now and again the characters start to life and move us for a moment; that is to say, this scene or that may have a truly dramatic interest due to the clash of contending desires; but no one of the three parts is really dramatic as a whole. No one of them is knit together; and no one of them is more than a tangle of intrigues and quarrels, of murders and skirmishes. Each of the three conjoined plays is artless, or at least it belongs to a very primitive period of the art of the stage, having scarcely a hint of the constructive skill that Shakspere was soon to display in the 'Comedy of Errors.'

In 'Henry VI' we discover (as may be discovered in the later chronicle-plays of Shakspere's own composition) the antique convention that the general is an actual combatant in the field and that the victory is due to his personal prowess and not to his tactics or his strategy. This convention lingered in English poetry as late as Addison's 'Campaign'; and it was probably a Homeric inheritance, the survival of what may have been the fact in the days of Achilles and Hector. In the Third Part of 'Henry VI' the rival leaders boastfully insult one another before battle, quite in the Homeric fashion. In the First Part the noble figure of Joan of Arc is ignobly

debased with needless indecency, the popular playwrights in London being then swift to blacken the enemies of England and to represent them as liars and cowards—just as some of the Attic dramatists had been unfair to the rivals of Athens. And Jack Cade may have been ignorant and foolish; but he could not have been quite the robust caricature that appears in the Second Part; he is here as false to fact as the popular agitator misrepresented by Sardou in 'Rabagas' nearly three centuries later.

Crude and rambling as are the three parts of 'Henry VI,' they are not below the average of the chronicle-plays then popular in the playhouses of London, however inferior they may be to the later histories which Shakspere was to write. And like many of these more primitive pieces, the three parts of 'Henry VI' are not without separate scenes handled with genuine dramatic power and not without occasional characters boldly projected. It is in these casual episodes and in these firmly drawn personages that we like to discover the improving touch of Shakspere's hand. King Henry himself is amply conceived and vigorously presented. Gloucester is the powerfully outlined figure of the future Richard III. Jack Cade, exaggerated as he may be, is instinct with life; and the scenes in which he appears have a richness of color suggesting the amplitude of humor that Shakspere was later to display.

The language throughout is high-pitched and sonorous, sometimes with the exuberance of bombastic rhetoric and sometimes with a lofty dignity, which suggests the pen of Marlowe, if not that of Shakspere himself. There is infrequent rime; and the most of the speeches are in flexible and resonant blank verse. In the effective and

significant scene in the First Part when the partizans of York and Lancaster declare their affiliations by plucking either a red rose or a white, there is a dexterity in the dialogue, a felicity in playing with words, a delight in verbal adroitness, which is rather in Shakspere's manner than in Marlowe's, and which has been taken as evidence that at least the phrasing of the successive speeches is Shakspere's, even if the invention of the scene may have been the work of the earlier devisers of the original piece. But we recognize the handiwork of Shakspere in these scenes rather because we are deliberately looking for it than because it is patent. Probably there is little danger in suggesting that if 'Henry VI' had not been included in the folio of 1623, few competent critics would have ascribed to Shakspere any considerable share in its composition.

III

The three parts of 'Henry VI' are specimens of the type known to us to-day as the chronicle-play. 'Titus Andronicus' is a specimen of another type, which is now called the tragedy-of-blood or revenge-play. Just as we classify the pieces we see in our modern theaters into society-comedies and problem-plays, so can we also differentiate the pieces performed in the Tudor playhouses. The chronicle-play had been raised to the level of literature by Marlowe; the comedy-of-humors was created later by Ben Jonson; and the dramatic-romance was developed by Beaumont and Fletcher. Perhaps the most characteristically Elizabethan of them all was the tragedy-of-blood, which Kyd made his own. It was an outgrowth of the chronicle-play, cross-fertilized by Senecan tragedy. It may also be regarded as the bridge between the formless

chronicle-play and the well-built tragedy of Shakspere's maturity.

While the plain people had delighted in the chronicle-play, scholars familiar with the classics recoiled from its laxity of structure and from its commingling of the comic and the tragic. They were shocked also by its violation of the alleged rules of dramatic propriety as these had been elaborated by the Italian critics. They followed these Italians in accepting Seneca as the model of dramatic excellence rather than Sophocles or even Euripides. They were unaware of the fact that the Hispano-Roman rhetorician had composed his poems in dialogue for recitation only, and not for actual performance. They relished the affluence of his oratorical passages and the sententious maxims with which these speeches were adorned; and they did not recoil from the frigid accumulation of horrors which characterizes the plays attributed to Nero's tutor.

As the scholar-poets of Italy first, and later those of France, had composed stately tragedies on the Senecan model, so in time did the scholar-poets of England. One of these imitations of the eloquent Roman was 'Gorboduc,' a tragedy in five acts, written by two courtiers. Although it seems to have been actually presented by amateurs before the queen—a severe test of the royal fortitude—it is essentially a closet-drama, since the action takes place off the stage and is only discussed by the characters. If the complex story of entangled assassinations had been shown in action the plot might have been interesting; but the bloody deeds were merely narrated by messengers, so that the needless chorus could comment sagely upon the vicissitudes. Because it was devoid of theatrical effectiveness, it never appeared on the public stage; and

because it did not possess the unities of time and place, it did not satisfy a scholar like Sidney, though he praised its "stately speeches and well-sounding phrases, climbing to the height of Seneca's style."

Unfitted as 'Gorboduc' was to attract the playgoing public, its authors dowered the English drama with blank verse, a noble instrument for dialogue. Blank verse had been devised by Surrey for his translation of the 'Æneid,' and it was soon adopted by Marlowe for his superb harangues. While the earlier composers of chronicle-plays were apparently men of little education, the later dramatists were often graduates of the universities. Marlowe and Kyd knew Seneca at first hand; and even without 'Gorboduc' they might well have been tempted to import into the English drama what they had admired in the Latin. Underneath the stiff rhetoric of the Roman's oratorical speeches was the adroit framework of an Athenian dramatist; and the Latin tragedies were theatrically effective even though their author had not intended them for any actual theater. There was in them not only shapeliness of plot but also unity of tone, qualities then wholly lacking in the rude pieces of the unlettered English playwrights. Even the cold cruelties, not surprising in dramas written in the reign of Nero, were not unpleasing to the Elizabethans, who were used to bear-baiting and bull-baiting, and who were accustomed to summary executions and to the display of traitors' heads on the gates of the Tower. Our more delicate nerves lead us to shrink from torture and bodily mutilation, and even from violent death; but the Elizabethans were stouter of stomach and they were closer to the Middle Ages, when the French miracle-plays had often represented the martyrdom of a saint with all its revolting details. Even in the Renas-

cence, and especially in the works of the Bolognese painters, we can discover a relish for the exhibition of physical suffering. Seneca's liking for bloodshed anticipates the sanguinary joy of his fellow-Spaniard, Ribera, just as the hard cruelty of his pupil Nero anticipates the determined ferocity of Torquemada. And perhaps we flatter ourselves nowadays, for although we like to think that this debased taste has been bred out of us, we can often find the same pandering to blood-lust in our yellow journalism.

The most successful tragedy-of-blood is Kyd's 'Spanish Tragedy,' a tale of ensanguined revenge, full of dark intrigue and of protracted reprisal. It is stark melodrama, reeking with horrors and never attaining to the terror of true tragedy. But it has an ingenious and interesting plot, which gives it a unity of theme and a dramatic vigor until then unknown in the English theater. The demand for vengeance stiffens the action, supplies a central motive force, and arouses the interest of expectancy. In a word, this dominating desire to insist on an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, makes the living picture-book into a true play-book. The atrocities which were coldly narrated in 'Gorboduc' are shown on the stage in the 'Spanish Tragedy,' which tries to rack the nerves of the spectators rather than to purge their souls; it is little more than yellow journalism dramatized; but it has that stiff assertion of the human will which is the very essence of the drama and which had been lacking in most of the chronicle-plays.

This bold tale of delayed vengeance, with its villain double-dyed, with its sheeted ghosts and with its play-within-the-play, marked an important epoch in the development of the medieval chronicle-play into the purer tragedy of Shakspere; and even in the loftiest of his

tragedies, in 'Hamlet,' in 'Macbeth' and in 'Lear,' we can perceive traces of the abiding influence of the inferior tragedy-of-blood. The 'Spanish Tragedy' itself, filled though it was with rant and with violence, deserved its abiding popularity, for it was richer in theatrical effect than any play earlier represented before English playgoers—with the possible exception of Marlowe's 'Tamburlaine.' Its success encouraged the later playwrights to eschew the normal and to seek out the abnormal, as likely to be more startling to the standing spectators in the yard. Even Shakspere did not hesitate to set on the stage strange events, marvelous coincidences, and unprecedented crimes, assured in advance that he could thus please the predilections of the playgoing public.

IV

'Titus Andronicus' is a tragedy-of-blood second in popularity only to the 'Spanish Tragedy.' Judged by the standard of the time, this popularity was well deserved. Revolting as the several episodes may be to us, the play gave the Elizabethans the kind of pleasure they expected in the theater. It has a complicated plot, easy to follow in action and gathering force as it moves onward. Its successive scenes may seem to us crude in art and brutal in tone, yet its very violence is but the excess of its essential force. Seen on the stage, it could not fail to arouse and to hold the interest of a contemporary audience. Its action advances swiftly; its characters are boldly outlined; its dialogue is stiff with top-lofty rhetoric. It may be only a medley of invective and assassination, of bombast and brutality; but it is adroitly devised to capture the favor of the groundlings. It has a struggle of contending de-

sires to sustain its structure. Even if it does accumulate horror on horror's head, this did not displease the full-blooded and coarse-grained playgoers for whom it had been compounded.

The gross callousness of 'Titus Andronicus,' its summary psychology, and the absence of all those finer qualities which are evident in Shakspere's later tragedies, have led many to deny that he could be in any way responsible for a turgid melodrama so repugnant and revolting. But it was published in quarto in 1594; it was credited to him by Meres in 1598; and it was included in the folio of 1623. He may not be its author in any exact sense, but he was its reviser—as he was the reviser of the three parts of 'Henry VI.' In the invaluable diary of Philip Henslowe, a broker in theatrical wares and a backer of theatrical enterprises, we find mention of 'tittus and Vespacia' and of 'titus and Ondronicus.' It may be that these entries refer only to one piece; and it may be that they indicate the existence of two pieces on the same subject. If there were two plays, then one of them may survive in a German version, which has been exhumed, and the other may survive in a Dutch version, which is also extant.

The English originals of both the German and the Dutch pieces are now lost; a comparison of the two versions in foreign languages shows that they differ in many details and that the play attributed to Shakspere contains incidents which exist only in one or the other of these versions. The inference is plain that the play as we have it is the result of a combination of the two English originals of these foreign versions; and this inference is fortified by the probability that one of the lost pieces belonged to the Earl of Leicester's players, of which organ-

ization Shakspere was a member, and the other to the Earl of Pembroke's players—two companies closely associated in 1594. There is, therefore, some warrant for believing that Shakspere took one of these plays and improved it by incorporating episodes and effects from the other play. This was only a casual task-work and it did not tax his invention. It was akin to the revision of a cyclopedia article for a new issue, which another writer merely brings down to date. And there is no reason to assume that Shakspere felt called upon to do more than this, although it is possible that he may have touched up the dialogue here and there and heightened now and again the impressiveness of a scene.

Even if Shakspere had been shocked by the crudity and the cruelty of the old plays he was strengthening and even if he had felt disgust at the harsh brutality of their horrors, he would not have been at liberty to modify them to any great extent. He was working for the actors themselves; and these performers were not likely to allow any of the old effects to be shorn from their parts—effects of which the value had been tested and proved year after year. His position was not unlike that of a playwright to-day, who might be called upon to prepare a new version of 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' and who would never dream of leaving out the flogging of the sable hero, however much that scene might be distasteful to himself. There is, however, no basis for the supposition that Shakspere himself was disgusted by the offensive episodes of 'Titus Andronicus.' They were not more objectionable than the kindred atrocities in other tragedies-of-blood, which were long familiar to him and in which he must have been acting at the time.

It is well for us always to keep in mind that Shakspere

himself was an Elizabethan, with the stout nerves and the insensibility to pain which seem to be characteristic of those spacious days. He could not help being his own contemporary. The story of 'Titus Andronicus' may appear to us repellent beyond measure, and we may like to think that Shakspere was working against the grain when he undertook to revise it; but this is only an unlikely surmise. On the other hand, we may note that even if he were not repelled by the hideous coarseness of the story, he was not really attracted to it, since he seems to have added little or nothing not ready to his hand in one or another of the plays which had achieved an earlier popularity. He was not inspired by the ghastly plot to make it his own and to elevate it by the fire of his imagination. It did not even tempt him to exercise his invention. His contribution to the play as it appears in the folio is certainly not to the construction and probably only a little to the characterization; seemingly it was confined to the rhetoric. In other words, he did the job confided to him in workmanlike fashion, but his heart was not in it. And perhaps this external polishing was all that he was permitted by his employers, who had no reason to foresee the dramaturgic dexterity he was soon to exhibit in plays wherein his interest was more obviously aroused.

V

Here it may be well to discuss, once for all, Shakspere's undeniable willingness to profit by the labors of others. It has often been made a matter of reproach to him that he was a plagiarist, remorselessly stealing subjects, situations and even whole plots. And when the charge is insisted upon there seems to be no defense—

except to analyze a little more closely the exact meaning which ought to attach to plagiarism. It is undeniable that Shakspere had no hesitation in taking his material wherever he found it and in "conveying" whatever he could lay hands on. The source of his inspiration can be found now in an English chronicler and again in a Greek historian. He was equally ready to snatch the hint for a tragic situation from a brief Italian tale and to purloin an entire comic plot from an English romance. On occasion he went even further and despoiled contemporary English playwrights of complete plays, making his profit out of their construction as well as out of their invention. In fact, there are only two of his pieces, his earliest comedy, 'Love's Labour's Lost,' and his latest comedy, the 'Tempest,' of which the ultimate sources have absolutely escaped discovery by the diligent detectives of modern scholarship.

Perhaps it may be as well to state the case against Shakspere as emphatically as possible, classifying the several exhibits which have been introduced in evidence to corroborate the charge of plagiarizing. He made four plays out of material which he found in Plutarch: 'Timon of Athens,' 'Coriolanus,' 'Julius Cæsar' and 'Antony and Cleopatra.' To these pieces, taken from Greek and Roman history, he added thirteen pieces taken from British history, for which his main reliance was Holinshed: the two parts of 'Henry IV,' 'Henry V,' the three parts of 'Henry VI,' 'Henry VIII,' 'Richard II,' 'Richard III,' 'King John,' 'Macbeth,' 'King Lear' and 'Cymbeline.' These plays, the four on classic themes and the thirteen on modern, were founded on what Shakspere believed to be fact; but he was equally willing to levy also upon what he knew to be fiction.

From three contemporary English novelists (two working in prose and one in verse) he borrowed the full framework of 'Romeo and Juliet,' 'As You Like It' and the 'Winter's Tale.' And from the varied collections of the earlier Italian novelists as these had reappeared in French and English translations, he derived directly or indirectly, incidents or episodes and sometimes even the central story for ten of his pieces: the 'Merchant of Venice,' 'Romeo and Juliet,' the 'Merry Wives of Windsor,' 'Much Ado about Nothing,' 'Twelfth Night,' 'All's Well that Ends Well,' 'Measure for Measure,' 'Othello,' 'Pericles' and 'Cymbeline.'

It has been noted already that nothing which can fairly be called a source has been discovered for two of his comedies, 'Love's Labour's Lost' and the 'Tempest'; apparently the stories of this pair of plays are due to Shakspere's invention. In three other comedies he may have utilized scant suggestions from fiction, but he seems to have relied mainly on himself; these are the 'Midsummer Night's Dream,' the 'Merry Wives of Windsor' and 'Much Ado about Nothing.' And there are eight plays wherein the construction of the plot, the articulation of the separate episodes is apparently to be credited to Shakspere himself, although he availed himself of situations and even of the sequence of events provided for him by earlier writers: 'Julius Cæsar,' 'All's Well that Ends Well,' 'Troilus and Cressida,' 'Macbeth,' 'Antony and Cleopatra,' 'Timon of Athens,' 'Coriolanus' and 'Cymbeline.'

To offset these eight pieces in which the scaffolding of the plot seems to be due to Shakspere's own ingenuity and to his own industry, there are at least fourteen of his plays which we now know to have been invented and

constructed by one or another of his predecessors and contemporaries. They were already familiar to the Elizabethan playgoer when Shakspere undertook to refashion them to his own liking or to the later needs of the company of actors for which he worked. Indeed, several of these pieces had an established popularity before Shakspere touched them. But this did not deter him from laying violent hands on them. And when he thus levied on the work of others, some of these men were probably still alive to be spectators at the performances of the new plays he had made out of their old plays. Attention must be called to the fact that among the dramas which Shakspere thus took over ready-made are two of the masterpieces that most securely buttress his fame—'Hamlet' and 'King Lear.' The other twelve are 'Titus Andronicus,' the three parts of 'Henry VI,' the two parts of 'Henry IV,' 'Henry V,' 'Richard II' and 'Richard III,' 'King John,' the 'Taming of the Shrew' and 'Measure for Measure.' It is even possible that this list is not complete, since four other pieces may have been borrowed from earlier plays which are now lost: the 'Comedy of Errors,' the 'Two Gentlemen of Verona,' the 'Merchant of Venice' and 'Troilus and Cressida.' The remoter original of the 'Comedy of Errors' is a Latin play. Perhaps 'Twelfth Night' should also be included in this list, since most of its plot may have been derived from an Italian play.

VI

This is the case against Shakspere's originality, frankly and fully stated. At first sight, it may appear incontrovertible. A hasty verdict might condemn Shakspere to the companionship of Boucicault, and to dismiss him as

unscrupulously ready to take any fish that swam into his net. He appears to offer himself as a witness in behalf of the school-boy's definition that "a plagiarist is a man who writes plays." But a closer consideration shows that the various groups of plays do not all stand upon the same footing. It is only fair to distinguish between these groups and to consider them severally. First of all, let us deal with the two groups which are derived from Plutarch and from Holinshed (or some other English historian). It is obviously absurd to cry plagiarism when a dramatist bases a play upon the records which a chronicler has collected. Even according to the loftiest standard of literary morality in the twentieth century, a poet has a right to interpret anew all the stories that the historians have narrated. Indeed, one might almost say that the facts of the chronicler are really apprehended by most of us only as they have been translated into the fiction of the poet. It is one of the functions of history to serve as the handmaid of poetry. The scattered happenings set down by the chronicler glow with a new illumination when they are perceived by the vision and the faculty divine. The poet alone is possessed of the philosopher's stone which changes the base metal of mere fact into the pure gold of everlasting truth.

In the next place we may consider two other groups, the dramatizations of English novels and the dramas more or less directly derived from the Italian tales. For a novelist to assert any right to control the recasting of his romance in dramatic form is a comparatively recent development. No such claim to ownership was put forward until at least two hundred years after Shakspere's death; and it received little legal recognition until about the middle of the nineteenth century. The older view

was rather that the dramatist was paying a compliment to the novelists when he condescended to borrow one of their plots. For example, Marmontel, in the preface to his 'Moral Tales,' expressed his gratification that one of his stories had been found serviceable as the foundation of a play and he hoped that others might also have the same good fortune. Evidently he felt no grievance; and his attitude was that of every writer of prose fiction a hundred years ago. Even in the early nineteenth century Byron would have been painfully surprised if he had been accused of wrong-doing because he made his 'Werner' out of one of Miss Lee's 'Canterbury Tales.' And even more recently Tennyson did not hesitate to take the plot of his narrative poem 'Dora' from Miss Mitford's prose narrative, 'Dora Creswell.' Of course, Tennyson did not hide the fact that he had undertaken an adaptation of a prose tale; this stands frankly confessed in a note, which was all the apology he felt called upon to make.

The same plea can be urged even more potently as regards the situations and even the entire plots which Shakspere took over from the Italian story-tellers. Boccaccio and his followers had gathered a treasury of narratives, tragic and comic, out of which all the Elizabethan playwrights felt privileged to help themselves at will. And so have the later poets of every modern tongue. Keats and Musset and Longfellow held it to be part of the high privilege of the poet to bestow a new setting upon an old legend. Shakspere gave to the 'Othello' which he found in the Italian (or in an English adaptation of the Italian) a largeness, an elevation, and a depth which the original did not even faintly suggest; and by so doing he made the story his own, once for all, even if it had been due originally to the invention of another.

Now we come to a group of plays, more than a third of all that he wrote, in which Shakspere was not dramatizing a story, long or short, but taking over bodily a play already written in English. It is in regard to this group that the hostile critics take their last stand. They would classify Shakspere with Charles Reade, who found a large part of the plot of his 'Hard Cash' ready-made in the 'Pauvres de Paris' of Brisebarre and Nus, or with Dion Boucicault, who transmogrified the same French play into the 'Streets of New York.' And, at first sight, the charge may appear to have a fairly solid foundation. But we may begin the defense by entering a plea of confession and avoidance, and by explaining that Shakspere was writing in the seventeenth century and not in the twentieth. He was only conforming to the custom of his own time. Under the theatrical condition of those remote days, a play did not belong to its author after he had sold it to a company of actors. It was then the absolute property of its purchasers; and they did not hesitate to call in other writers to amend it and bring it up to date. Ben Jonson was thus hired to make additions to Kyd's 'Spanish Tragedy.' Indeed, we may go further and draw attention again to the fact that a play, even one of Shakspere's, was not then considered as literature. It was looked upon much as we nowadays regard an article in a cyclopedia, as a piece of work which the purchaser had a right to have revised without consulting the original composer. And apparently the playwrights themselves accepted the situation, strange as this may seem to us nowadays. No one of those whose pieces Shakspere rewrote ever made any protest—with the possible exception of Greene, whose dying diatribe seems to have had another cause than this.

There was then nothing extraordinary in this attitude.

It existed also in Spain at the same moment, and in France even later. Two of Calderón's most striking dramas, the 'Alcalde of Zalamea' and the 'Physician of His Own Honor,' are founded upon earlier dramas, bearing the same titles and written by Lope de Vega. Molière's 'Don Garcie de Navarre' was probably taken straight from his Spanish original; but his 'Don Juan' was more or less directly derived from a French version of an Italian adaptation from the original Spanish. And it would not be difficult to multiply examples of this bold appropriation of successful plays due to the invention and to the constructive skill of earlier playwrights who might still survive. This practice was so common that it raised no objection; and in conforming to it, Shakspere was in no sense singular. If he had been taken to task he would probably have alleged in rebuttal that he had the warrant of custom—and of a custom which no one was to attack for many a year after his bones had been laid to rest at Stratford.

VII

These are the excuses, more or less valid, which may be made for Shakspere, when we condescend for the moment to take this accusation of plagiarism seriously. If we allow a youthful critic to set up an austere standard of absolute originality and to insist that a poet must always invent the themes he chooses to present, then Shakspere stands convicted a plagiarist and as one of the most shameless of plagiarists—to be put in the pillory by the side of Calderón and of Molière. But to assume this absurd attitude, to set up this false standard, to take this ridiculous charge seriously, is a confession of juvenility.

It discloses us immediately as absurdly ignorant of the history of literature and frankly unfamiliar with the highest function of the poetic imagination.

Great poets rarely invent their myths. They are not specially interested in mere invention, reserving the full force of their imagination rather for the nobler work of interpretation. Milton found his loftiest inspiration in telling anew the Fall of Man, the very oldest of tales. Goethe seized with avidity the fascinating figure of Faust, despite the fact that Marlowe had already projected it with epic vigor. Byron was attracted to Don Juan, although Molière had already depicted powerfully the sinister personality of this insatiable seducer. The Greek dramatic poets delighted in presenting, each in his turn, the dominant characters of Hellenic legend, Œdipus and Agamemnon and Medea. Modern dramatic poets, Italian and British and American, have yielded to the charm of Francesca da Rimini. Tennyson went back to the 'Morte d'Arthur'; and Longfellow went back to the 'Golden Legend.' Morris returned to the Sagas; and Wagner returned to the 'Niebelungen Lied.'

It seems as though the poets often shrink disdainfully from any effort for originality of situation and of story. Apparently they feel that invention is only a minor function of the imagination, and that its major function is the illumination of themes already invented. Whenever they are attracted to a subject they take it for their own, whether it is old or new; they appropriate it, they assimilate it, they reincarnate it and reinvigorate it, never troubled by the fact that they did not invent it. They needed it and they found it ready to their hand. Shelley was speaking for the rest of the gild of poets when he recalled "the venerable allegory that the muses are the

daughters of memory; not one of the nine was ever said to be the daughter of invention."

The poets do not seek for originality because they know that it is to be found inside and not outside. The external originality which has been sought for is likely to have an aspect of eccentricity. Why strain and struggle for novelty of plot? Are not the old tales the best after all?—that they have survived is evidence they have pleased many and pleased long. And after all, is novelty actually possible? Gozzi declared that there were only thirty-six dramatic situations; and when Goethe and Schiller tried to catalogue these situations they failed to find as many as Gozzi had counted. So there are only fifty-two cards in the pack, and no matter how strenuously we may shuffle, the hand we deal ourselves must have been held by some other player in the long ago.

As originality of plot is barely possible, it is, in the more elevated planes of poetry, not really important. "We do not ask where people get their hints, but what they made out of them," as Lowell said: "any slave of the mine may find the rough gem, but it is the cutting and polishing that reveal its heart of fire; it is the setting that makes it a jewel to hang at the ear of Time." Shakspere profited by hints from all sorts of sources and he knew what to make out of them. On occasion he took more than a single rough gem; he took also the rude necklace into which a handful of stones had been artlessly arranged. But he it was who revealed their heart of fire. We have replevined from the dust-bin of oblivion the complete plays which Shakspere made over into the 'Taming of the Shrew,' 'Henry V' and 'King Lear,' and they are barren and empty enough. They are so poor that we marvel how it was that they were able to stimulate Shakspere's

imagination. It is not merely that Shakspere bettered what he borrowed; he transfigured it. He strengthened its construction; he peopled it with human beings; he lifted it up to the exalted ether of poetry; he gave it significance; in a word, "he mixed himself up with whatever he took—an incalculable increment" (as Lowell said of Gray).

The 'Taming of the Shrew' is not one of Shakspere's richest comedies; its structure is mechanical; its humor is external; its gaiety is physical rather than intellectual. But when we compare it with the primitive piece out of which it was refashioned, it appears for the moment almost a masterpiece. The rude and boisterous farce has been made into an exuberant comedy having a recognizable resemblance to human nature. And what Shakspere did in comedy, he did also and even better in tragedy, as we discover when we contrast his 'King Lear' with the earlier piece which he chose to make over. By some strange alchemy of the imagination that which was cheap became precious and that which was tawdry became sublime. The story is but little altered—far too little for our modern taste; and yet his magic touch has transmuted what he took, purging it of most of its brutality and charging it with a significance unsuspected by the uninspired originator of the plot. That which Shakspere found a violent piece of Elizabethan melodrama he left a marvelous illustration of eternal tragedy.

CHAPTER IV

HIS EARLIEST COMEDIES

I

The development of Shakspere as a playwright is like his development as a poet, in that it divides itself naturally into three periods not sharply set off from one another and yet easily perceived when we consider the probable sequence of his plays. As a playwright he began by a period of experiment during which he was cautiously studying the secrets of the art and trying to find out by experience how to put a story together so that it might be effective on the stage. He was diligent in discovering the fittest devices for exposition and for construction; and he was alert in analyzing the methods of his predecessors and swift to appropriate the effects which he found available for his own purpose. As a result of this assiduous training, his hand gained a more assured certainty of stroke; and in time he attained to an undisputed mastery when he knew exactly what he wanted to do, when he knew also how best to do this, and when he knew himself. To this second period belong the most charming of his romantic-comedies and the most searching of his tragedies. Then toward the close of his career in London his effort is obviously less intense, as though he had begun to weary of his incessant productivity, nearly twoscore plays in only a little longer than a score of years. His interest in the ever fresh problems of construction seems

then to slacken and he no longer spends his strength in putting together a satisfactory framework for his story, content to endow it with vital characters and to ennoble it with the lavish wealth of his poetry.

The three periods of his development as a poet almost coincide with the three periods of his development as a playwright. In his youth he is rather lyric than truly dramatic; in his earlier pieces the poetry rather is his own, the result of his own effort, than the inevitable self-expression of his characters. His verse is deliberately clever and it abounds in rimes and in conceits. He is playing with words rather than with ideas; and his glittering lines repeat the graceful note which echoes and re-echoes through all the Elizabethan sonneteers. But his pretty speeches are not yet stirred by genuine passion or weighted by large wisdom. This early verse suggests that he has not then within him a great deal which demands utterance; and we can almost catch him in the act of padding out his lines with precious epithets and with remote comparisons, such as were in high favor among all the young poets of the day. In time he masters his instrument and discovers that he has a fuller breath with which to play on it. He grows in power and in passion, in insight and in understanding. The thought rarely needs to be pieced out; and often the liquid lines flow on one after the other with a perfect balance between form and content. With this ultimate harmony of matter and manner all effort disappears. Then toward the end he has so enriched his mind that it was always overflowing; and he has too much to say for perfect ease of delivery. His thoughts are pressed down and running over; and his lines lack the fluidity of the middle period. His verse is so overcharged with meaning that it staggers under its

burden; and the words rush out so tumultuously that they stumble over each other. And as this final period of his development as a poet almost coincides with the final period of his development as a playwright, we find in his latest plays stories loosely tumbled together, but carried on by characters instinct with veracity and dowered with an amplitude of wisdom and a variety of passion, never achieved by any other dramatic poet.

It is only by bearing in mind these successive periods of his progress as a playwright and as a poet that we can account for the comparative emptiness of his first attempts as a dramatist. Between 1590 and 1593 (a little earlier and a little later), he accomplished the thankless task of revising 'Titus Andronicus' and the three parts of 'Henry VI' and he also composed four more or less original comedies, 'Love's Labour's Lost,' the 'Comedy of Errors,' the 'Two Gentlemen of Verona' and a 'Midsummer Night's Dream.' In the revision of 'Titus Andronicus' and of 'Henry VI' we can discover little or nothing that we recognize as indubitably Shaksperian. In the four comedies we find much that is marked with his image and superscription. In them he put not a little of himself, of the youthful lyrist who was then engaged also in writing 'Venus and Adonis' and the 'Rape of Lucrece.' We cannot be certain as to the exact order in which these four comedies were produced; but we have a conviction that they followed one another on the stage in swift succession. They were not task-work, undertaken solely at the behest of his colleagues of the playhouse; they were the result of the spontaneous exercise of his juvenile cleverness. They amply display his inventive ingenuity, his ready wit, his lyric grace, and his ardent desire to spy out the secrets of play-making.

These four comedies, pleasant as they may be in their several ways, are after all only the tentative experiments of an inexperienced dramatic poet in his 'prentice years; and we have no right to be disappointed if we do not perceive in them the unmistakable excellence of the masterpieces of his middle years. It would be absurd to seek in them for the ample fervor of his later verse or for the strong simplicity of his later plots, for the full warm humor to which he was soon to attain or for the incomparable power of creating vital characters and of piercing to the soul of man at the moment of ultimate crisis. They are what they had to be at this epoch of his evolution; and most of them are interesting to us now, not so much for their own sake as for the sake of their author. Only one of them, a 'Midsummer Night's Dream,' has really contributed to his cosmopolitan reputation; and his fame would be but little diminished if he were not known to be the author of the other three.

II

'Love's Labour's Lost' is believed to be Shakspere's earliest original piece; and it is one of the most original of all in so far as the story itself is concerned, which seems to be of his own contriving. Unavailing search has been made to ascertain the source of his plot; and we may well doubt whether it will ever be discovered, since this plot is exactly what a clever and aspiring young fellow would be likely to make up out of his own head when he commences playwright and when he does not know enough about human nature to be willing to rely on it. A king and three of his courtiers solemnly renounce the society of women for three years; and they immediately meet a

princess with three of her ladies. The king promptly falls in love with the princess, and each of his three courtiers falls in love with one of her ladies. This is an artificial theme; it is arbitrary in its exactness; and the comedy built upon it is squarely symmetrical in its handling. The invented tale is but little related to real life; it is thin and devoid of the persuasive humor of true comedy.

'Love's Labour's Lost' has been described not unfairly as "polite comic opera." It is a testimony to the juvenility of its author, because it is fanciful, not to call it fantastic, superficial in its insight and mechanical in its construction, with its successive episodes carefully balancing each other and with its final pairing off of the four wooers hopelessly forsworn and exposed to one another's derision. Its action is external rather than internal since its movement is due to the direct intervention of the author himself, pulling his puppets to and fro and allowing them little exercise of free will.

Yet the piece begins brightly and the exposition is adroitly managed. The king and his three courtiers proclaim their solemn pact at the opening of the play. Then, after certain avowedly comic characters have been introduced, the princess and her ladies discuss the king and his courtiers, characterizing them wittily. Expectation is thus aroused for the meeting of the four future lovers with their four future lady-loves. But thereafter the action flags and the young author has failed to build up a sequence of comic situations to set forth the several aspects of his theme. He relies rather on wit-combats; and it is not until the comedy is three-quarters finished that a really humorous situation is developed to revive the drooping interest of the spectators. At last, seemingly having run out of matter, the author bolsters up the

final scenes with the buffoonery of an ill-acted mask, filled with figures of fun, brought on only that the lordly lovers may laugh at them. It is a trick of artistic immaturity to introduce characters making fools of themselves solely that the brighter persons in the play may be allowed to scoff. This is akin to primitive practical joking; and not often does it move an audience to mirth.

The play is not adequately plotted, nor is its story carried on by characters of any validity. The king and the princess, the courtiers and the ladies, are only thin outlines tinted in primary colors, with little of the shifting complexity of human nature; they are not so much true characters as they are pleasant parts for the actors. The more broadly humorous persons in the play are intended to contrast with the light comedy of the princely double quartet; and they are traditional stage-types, the braggart and the pedant and the clown. Thus they also are parts for the actors rather than recognizable human beings. There is no need for wonder that Shakspere, when he was making his first venture as an original playwright, and at the moment when he was about to write his two narrative poems, should rely rather on his decoration than on his construction, and that with the success of the courtly type of comedy before him, he should then believe brisk and brilliant dialogue to be an acceptable substitute for dexterity of situation and for veracity of character. This belief had been shared by many another witty young fellow; and it is responsible for the pervading glitter in the text of Congreve and Sheridan, who composed all their comedies before they came to their years of discretion.

The dialogue is undeniably clever, even if it reveals

itself as too conscious of its own cleverness, and even if it is not always as clever as it seeks to be. Congreve once declared that a comedy by one of his contemporaries contained many lines which looked like wit and yet were not wit; and this criticism lies also against 'Love's Labour's Lost.' Even when the wit is indisputable, it is often only verbal; it is not rooted in observation of life; it does not flower out of character; and it does not relate itself necessarily to the situation. The merry jests which besprinkle the speeches of the lords and ladies are not so much their own spontaneous utterances as witticisms at large, which might be transferred at will from one character to another. And where these speeches are poetic rather than witty, the poetry is lyric rather than dramatic. There is a larger proportion of rime than in any other of Shakspere's plays; and the rimes not only pair in couplets, but arrange themselves in stanzas and sometimes even in sonnets. This lends an added artificiality to the dialogue and seems to detract still further from the sincerity of the comedy as a whole. But this lyric quality has a youthful charm of its own. As the pleasant verse falls upon our ears, it seems almost as if we could see the young poet delighting in his own playing with words and rejoicing at his own ingenuity in bringing forth appropriate conceits. He tosses a word in the air and bandies it to and fro from speaker to speaker, with obvious satisfaction in the cunning of his hand.

It must be noted, however, that, even if the brilliancy of the dialogue is sometimes rather cheap and sometimes a little far-fetched, the author himself is on the side of healthy common sense. He brings to grief the king and his courtiers who have unnaturally resolved to forego the society of the other sex. And he satirizes the affected

foppery of speech which was more or less prevalent at the time when he wrote. In some of its aspects 'Love's Labour's Lost' suggests the 'Précieuses Ridicules' and in others it recalls the 'Femmes Savantes,' however obviously inferior it may be to either of Molière's plays in solidity of plot, in robustness of character-delineation, in breadth of humor and in importance of theme. When Molière wrote the first of these two comedies he was already an experienced playwright; when Shakspere wrote 'Love's Labour's Lost' he was only at the threshold of his career, taking his first timid steps as a dramatist.

III

Yet there are few signs of this inexpert timidity in the 'Comedy of Errors,' which was probably the play Shakspere produced immediately after 'Love's Labour's Lost.' Plot, which is the special quality that the earlier piece lacks, is the special quality upon which he successfully concentrates his effort in the later piece. Hazlitt asserted that Shakspere "appears to have bestowed no great pains" on the 'Comedy of Errors,' a curiously inept comment when we consider the adroit complication of its action. Complexity of intrigue cannot be achieved without taking pains; and there is no play of Shakspere's, not even his major masterpieces of construction, 'Romeo and Juliet' and 'Othello,' to the plotting of which he must have given more conscientious labor. The skeleton of the action is articulated with a skill really surprising in a young playwright, working in a century when the principles of dramatic construction had been little considered. Perhaps its author had felt the emptiness of the story in 'Love's Labour's Lost' and had, therefore, resolved that

the 'Comedy of Errors' should be free from this defect at least.

Taine once declared that the art of play-making is as capable of improvement as the art of watchmaking; and in this piece the art of the play-maker *is* closely akin to that of the watchmaker, since its merits are mainly mechanical. And the amusement which the 'Comedy of Errors' arouses even to-day when it is acted in the theater is the result of a dexterous adjustment of situations as one equivoke follows another and as one twin is confused with the other. There is an adroit crescendo of comic perplexity. Considered merely as a mechanism, as an artfully contrived imbroglio, due to a constantly increasing comicality caused by a succession of mistakes of identity, the 'Comedy of Errors' demands high praise even to-day, although the later pupils of Scribe have achieved farces of a more surprising intricacy. Entangled as the characters are in the deliberately devised complications, the action is transparently clear to the spectator, who gains an added pleasure from his superior knowledge hidden from the persons of the play, all of them lost in a puzzling labyrinth to which they have no clue.

Shakspere borrows the plan of his play from the 'Menæchmi' of Plautus; and he may have got the hint of doubling Dromio from the 'Amphitruo' of the same Latin author, although possibly he derives this idea from an earlier piece, the 'History of Error,' which is known to have existed, but which, like so many other Elizabethan dramas, is now lost. Yet Shakspere's play, even if its imbroglio is derived from the Latin play, is much more than a mere adaptation from Plautus. The English dramatist may lean heavily upon the Roman playwright, but he completely rehandles the material he takes over

from the Latin; and he adds to it not a few of the most effective episodes. There are in Plautus twelve instances of mistaken identity; and in Shakspere there are eighteen. Furthermore Shakspere cleanses away most of the vulgarity flagrant in Plautus and perhaps to be explained by the fact that the Latin playwright wrote his pieces to be performed by slaves before an audience of ignorant freedmen who had to be amused at all costs.

Farce as the 'Comedy of Errors' frankly is—since our interest is aroused mainly by the plot itself and only a little by the characters who carry it on—none the less Shakspere has given it a human quality, due to the sympathetically drawn figure of the wife and to the delicately delineated figure of her sister. He has also stiffened the story by the early introduction of Ægeon, the father of the separated Antipholi. The exposition is a masterpiece of invention; and here the playwright had a difficult problem before him. For the spectators to enjoy the swift sequence of blunders they needed to know all about the two pairs of twins. How is this information to be conveyed to them before either pair of twins appears on the stage? Shakspere opens the play with Ægeon on trial for his life, than which nothing could more certainly arrest the attention of the audience. In his search for his lost sons the merchant has come to Ephesus, in defiance of the decree which forbade any Syracusan to land upon its shores under penalty of death. In self-defense Ægeon explains the potent reason for his rashness; and thus he not only puts the audience in possession of all the information they need for the comprehension of ensuing perplexities, but also awakens interest in his own sad plight, thereby strengthening the serious appeal of the comic story.

The reappearance of Ægeon toward the end of the play gives dignity to the final episodes. Indeed, Shakspere displays here for the first time his appreciation of the value of mounting up steadily to a climax. At first the equivokes are those of the Dromios and the merriment these arouse is plainly farcical; the later mistakes in which the two masters are involved are in a richer vein of humor; and when Adriana is led to believe that she has lost her husband's love, the fun has a serious lining and seems to point to an impending domestic catastrophe. In a plot relying wholly upon the elaborate ingenuity of its machinery there is little space for the portrayal of character, since the characters can be only what the situations require and permit. But Adriana is a genuine woman; she may be drawn in profile only, but the strokes are true, and they are sufficient to make us recognize her reality. It is in the elevation of Adriana that Shakspere most plainly reveals his superiority to Plautus. The English farce is funnier than the Roman; and it is also more human and more humane. Despite the frequent beatings of the two Dromios, the 'Comedy of Errors' is less callous than the 'Menæchmi'; it is in better taste; and it conforms to a finer standard of morals.

The charge has been urged that in putting twin servants into his play in addition to twin masters, Shakspere doubles the improbability of the theme. But even when there is only one pair of twins the improbability is a staring impossibility. That two brothers separated in boyhood, brought up in different countries, should as full-grown men be so alike in speech, in accent, in vocabulary, in manner, and even in costume that the wife of one should take the other for her own husband—this is simply inconceivable. It could happen to two pairs of twins just as

easily as it could happen to one. Impossible as this may be, it is the postulate of the play. The audience must accept it or they debar themselves from enjoying the piece which is founded upon this impossibility. Experience proves that playgoers are always willing to allow the dramatist to start from any point of departure that he may choose, provided that the play which he erects upon this premise proves to possess the power of amusing them. They will yield this license even when the theme is serious, as in the 'Corsican Brothers,' and still more willingly when they are invited only to laugh. Coleridge was characteristically shrewd when he declared that "the definition of a farce is, an improbability or even impossibility granted at the outset, see what odd and laughable events will fairly follow from it."

IV

In 'Love's Labour's Lost' Shakspere had relied upon the artificial sparkle of the dialogue, as in the 'Comedy of Errors' he had relied on the mechanical arrangement of the situations. In 'Two Gentlemen of Verona' he relies rather upon the unexpected misadventures of his characters. He seems to be feeling for the formula of that romantic-comedy he was soon to achieve in the 'Merchant of Venice' and in 'Much Ado about Nothing'; and perhaps there is no reason for surprise that he should not be able to attain it at this first attempt. The comparative weakness of the play is due partly to the fact that Shakspere does not yet appreciate the full possibilities of romantic-comedy and partly to his neglect of the painstaking construction with which he had just sustained the 'Comedy of Errors.' He is seen to be taking at once a

step forward and a step backward. He is aiming at a play superior in kind to the farce which preceded it and yet he is negligent in providing this more poetic piece with a solidly built skeleton, such as had sustained the less poetic piece. The 'Comedy of Errors' may repose upon an arrant impossibility, but it is an amusing specimen of its type. The 'Two Gentlemen of Verona' is at once more ambitious and less successful, mainly because Shakspere fails to bestow upon the comedy of loftier pretension the plausibility with which he had covered up the impossibility of the humbler farce.

The 'Two Gentlemen of Verona' is so loosely put together, so casual in its plotting and so devoid of verisimilitude of motive, that it impresses the student as probably being only the careless throwing on the stage of some contemporary novel of amatory haps and mishaps. Yet no one story seems to have suggested the play; apparently Shakspere put it together unaided, helping himself at will to stock characters and to stock episodes from the unreal fictions which then enjoyed a fleeting popularity. Proteus leaves Julia, to whom he is betrothed, at Verona and joins his friend Valentine at Milan. Valentine vaunts the charms of Silvia; and when Proteus meets Silvia he falls so violently in love with her that he forgets Julia and basely betrays Valentine's plan to elope. Julia disguises herself as a boy (anticipating Rosalind and Viola); and Proteus sends her to bear messages of love to Silvia. Valentine, banished from Milan, becomes the leader of a band of outlaws; and it is in the forest that Proteus, in the presence of Julia, proffers violence to Silvia. Valentine overhears this and rebukes his former friend, who promptly abjures his evil designs and expresses his contrition. Valentine accepts this unconvincing re-

pentance and quite inexcusably offers to surrender Silvia to Proteus, an example of exalted romanticist self-sacrifice quite out of nature. Then Julia's disguise is discovered and Proteus instantly returns to his love for her:—

> What is in Silvia's face, but I may spy
> More fresh in Julia's, with a constant eye?

This succession of startling changes in fortune and in desire is perhaps not more absurd than Shakspere was to show us later in other plays; but in the 'Two Gentlemen of Verona,' the characters seem to be inconsistent almost for the sake of inconsistency. They are wilfully self-contradictory; and the spectators can never guess what they will do next, except that it will be illogical and extravagant. Shakspere makes no effort to give sincerity to his sophisticated story, to account for the inexplicable conversions of Proteus or to justify the constancy of Julia in disregard of his outrageous conduct. The characters do not act like men and women of flesh and blood; nor are they moved by motives which we are willing to accept as natural. Shakspere does not offer to palliate any of these sudden transformations of Proteus or to explain the inconceivable magnanimity of Valentine. Probably he believed that these things were pleasing to the audience of his own time, the standing spectators in the yard, who thrilled more easily in unison with the emotion of surprise than with the emotion of recognition.

It is only fair to note that Shakspere is not guilty here of greater violence to human nature than were Beaumont and Fletcher a few years later, after Shakspere himself had set them the example of logical adherence to normal conduct. Where, however, the 'Two Gentlemen of Verona' is inferior to the dramatic-romances of the col-

laborating poets is not in unreality but in dramatic interest. 'Philaster' may be as unreal as the 'Two Gentlemen of Verona' but it is theatrically effective, with a sweeping movement and a surging fire of emotion wholly lacking in this earliest attempt at romantic-comedy. Shakspere composes this feeble play almost as if he did not believe in it himself, whereas Beaumont and Fletcher allow themselves to be carried away by the rush of their own story.

In 'Philaster,' again, the lack of plausibility and the unexpected contradictions of character are occasional only and may for the moment be concealed from us by the theatrical effectiveness of the situations they bring about, whereas in the 'Two Gentlemen of Verona' the inconsistency of Proteus is the mainspring of the action. We are never allowed to lose sight of it; and yet it does not result in situations of genuine dramatic power. There are more effective scenes in the 'Two Gentlemen' than in 'Love's Labour's Lost' (which was almost barren of situation), but they are perhaps less effective in themselves, since we are forced to see the improbability of the means whereby they arrive, because Shakspere keeps on calling our attention to the unveracity of his psychology. In this play, however, as in his later and finer romantic-comedies the heroines are truer to life than the heroes. Julia and Silvia are genuine women, even if Proteus and Valentine are only manikins, moved hither and thither to make the plot work. There is sincerity in both of them; and in Julia there is pathos also and even poetry. Experimental as Shakspere's handling of characters may be, it is here founded on observation and on insight.

The play, taken as a whole, is uninteresting in story and clumsy in plot; yet it evidences the slow growth of Shakspere's ability to handle character, not only in the

two heroines but also in the comic figures. It is obvious that there were in the company of actors to which he belonged and for which he wrote his plays, two low comedians, two "clowns" as they were then called. For this pair of funny men, favorites of the playgoer who joyed in their frequent appearance and who was ready to laugh almost even before they opened their lips, he composed Costard and Dull in 'Love's Labour's Lost,' the two Dromios in the 'Comedy of Errors,' and Launce and Speed in the 'Two Gentlemen of Verona,' as he was later to fit them with the young and the old Gobbo in the 'Merchant of Venice.'

The clown of the Elizabethan theater was descended directly from the Vice of the medieval stage, a welcome figure who claimed a large license of speech. In the dialogue of the French mysteries the part of the *sot* (as the low comedian was termed) seems sometimes to have been left blank, the histrionic humorist being at liberty to say whatever came into his head so long as he could evoke abundant laughter. From Hamlet's advice to the Players we can see that Shakspere, naturally enough, did not like his clowns to speak more than was set down for them. And in his earliest plays he takes care to put into their mouths the kind of joke the spectator expected from them. Costard and Dull, and the pair of Dromios, are little more than buffoons, bandying jests and making verbal quibbles; they are prolific in the traditional quips of the jack-pudding, unrelated to the character the actor is supposed to be impersonating. But as Shakspere does not wish them to interpolate jests of their own, he writes for them jests which might be their own. Only as he gains in experience does he raise his comic parts into actual characters; and in the 'Two Gentlemen of Verona' we can

perceive the transition, since Speed is still a mere clown, while Launce is already almost a human being with a humorous individuality of his own.

V

It is in the 'Midsummer Night's Dream' that we find the first of Shakspere's truly comic characters, Bottom, a largely conceived creature, rich in humor and prefiguring the robuster and riper character of Falstaff. Bottom is not deliberately witty, like the clowns in the earlier comedies, cracking jokes beyond their capacity and bristling with merely verbal jests. He is the first character Shakspere has given us who is unconsciously humorous, funny in spite of himself, and, therefore, far more comic than the traditional figures sent on the stage to enliven the dialogue with external witticisms. In Bottom and his mates we can perceive imagination working on observation. We can not doubt that Bottom is taken from life, not from any one man, but from intimate acquaintance with many men. Bottom stands on his own feet; he is no longer the slightly transformed Vice of the medieval stage. He is exuberant in humor because he is inexorably human. Superb in self-conceit, he is an eternal caricature of the amateur actor, fed on flattery and ready to undertake any part in any play or every part in every play.

The comicality of Bottom is most ingeniously enhanced by his juxtaposition with Titania. There is poetic irony in the spectacle of an ethereal fairy-queen who is lost in love for a vulgar clod of a man decked with an ass's head. If 'Love's Labour's Lost' is in its tone polite comic opera, the 'Two Gentlemen of Verona' is in its theme *opéra comique,* recalling the librettos of the 'Dame Blanche' and

'Fra Diavolo,' which Scribe made for Auber—except that its structure lacks the deftness of Scribe's handiwork. So the 'Midsummer Night's Dream' is a *féerie*, a fairy-play, with its magical misadventures and with its sudden transformations. It is one of the most graceful and charming of Shakspere's poetic pieces in its lyric atmosphere, artificial and fantastic, yet with a reality of its own. It is the most exquisite of his comedies, standing out early in the list of his plays, much as the 'Tempest' stands out later. It is a pure pleasure, of imagination all compact. It is the earliest of his plays, comic or tragic, to demand inclusion in any list of his most characteristic pieces, for although it may not be one of his absolute masterpieces no one but Shakspere could have conceived it.

But even if the 'Midsummer Night's Dream' marks an indisputable advance over the comedies that had gone before it, the two pairs of lovers are less firmly depicted than those in the 'Two Gentlemen of Verona,' and the element of pathos is lacking. The poetry is in the atmosphere of the whole play rather than in the characters. And on more careful analysis, we can perceive that the dramatic poet was utilizing more adroitly devices he had already tested in the preceding plays. Much of the fun is evoked by a mistaken identity not unlike that on which the 'Comedy of Errors' is based; but in the 'Midsummer Night's Dream' these blunders are not caused by the arbitrary resemblances of brothers; they are due to a wanton act of magic, done before the eyes of the spectator and thereby arousing a gleeful anticipation of the inevitable result. Lysander is recreant to Helena, as Proteus forswears Julia; but Lysander is constrained by a spell, and we are well aware that he will gladly return to his first love whenever the charm is removed. Helena

pursues Lysander, as Julia follows Proteus; and we sympathize with her more heartily because we see that her deserting lover is not as despicable as Proteus, since he is swayed by an unsuspected occult power. Lysander's fickleness is excusable because it is not his own fault; and we welcome therefore the ultimate union of the lovers, whereas we have little confidence in the future happiness of Julia and Proteus.

There is a closer resemblance between the terminations of the 'Midsummer Night's Dream' and 'Love's Labour's Lost.' The performance of the mask in the earlier play anticipates the performance of 'Pyramus and Thisbe' in the later. But here again there is undeniable improvement. Bottom and his fellows are far funnier than the caricatures who take part in the mask. And the attitude of those for whom the little play is performed has also altered for the better. The chief characters in 'Love's Labour's Lost' contemptuously mock at the maskers and scorn their honest efforts to amuse; but in the 'Midsummer Night's Dream,' Theseus is kindly and tolerant, gently refusing to scoff and considerately taking pleasure in what was proffered to please him. Here Shakspere reveals his growth in knowledge of the world, or at least in both courtesy and politeness. It may be admitted that in neither of these comedies is the final entertainment by amateurs an integral part of the play. The youthful author has run out of matter, and therefore he fills up with extraneous interludes. The story is already complete, but the play has to go on; and therefore both comedies are furnished with postscripts of robust buffoonery, contrived to send away the audience gladdened by laughter. Here Shakspere was doing none too skilfully very much what Molière was to do in the next century, when he per-

mitted two of his most amusing comedies, the 'Bourgeois Gentilhomme' and the 'Malade Imaginaire' to tail off into pure burlesque. Indeed, this is not unlike what Shakspere himself was to do again in the 'Merry Wives of Windsor,' although the dancing drollery at the end of that lively farce has a much closer connection with the plot of the play.

This one deficiency in artistic symmetry once noted, there can be only high praise for the construction. The story is as abundant in comic situations as the 'Comedy of Errors,' while its mechanical dexterity is far more closely concealed. The situations are logically linked together, each of them developing easily from the one that went before. The skeleton of the action is adroitly articulated; and the exposition is most satisfactory, recalling that of the 'Comedy of Errors,' in that it is accomplished by the personal statements of the parties in interest before the ruler of the state, sitting as a judge. The plot may appear complicated, if we try to put it into narrative, yet it is simple to follow in action. There are four pairs of lovers in all. Theseus and his bride, awaiting their wedding, and the two couples of young men and maidens are set before us in the opening scene. A little later Oberon and Titania let us learn at once the cause of their bickering, for there is contention in fairy-land as there is a clash of desire among the mortal lovers. Thus the drama is sustained and stiffened by comic conflict, the outcome of which the spectators await with joyous anticipation.

In the midst of these poetic figures, fairies and mortals in love, are the prosaic handicraftsmen, headed by Bottom, horny-handed sons of toil with artistic aspirations. This is a strange medley of folk; and yet there is no discordant note in all the lovely comedy. There is an abid-

ing unity of tone; everything is in keeping; and one misadventure follows another without raising a cavil from the most censorious critic. The whole play is a paradise of dainty delight. Its scene may declare itself in Athens; but it is an Athens where the intensely British Bottom is at home and where fairies dwell in the neighboring wood—an Athens surrounded by the Forest of Arden and not remote from the sea-coast of Bohemia—an Athens which is the capital of an undiscovered country, illumined by the light that never was on sea or land.

In the 'Midsummer Night's Dream'—as also in the 'Two Gentlemen of Verona,' although less obviously in the latter—Shakspere is employing a pattern set by Lyly; he is devising not so much a genuine comedy as a court entertainment, a show-piece, bristling with pleasant surprises and adorned with agreeable spectacle. In this effort he is triumphantly successful, far surpassing the slighter pieces of the earlier poet in whose footsteps he is following.

VI

As we compare these four comedies we can see that Shakspere was successful in accomplishing his design in two of them, the 'Comedy of Errors' and the 'Midsummer Night's Dream,' and also that he was less successful, to say the least, in the execution of the other two, 'Love's Labour's Lost' and the 'Two Gentlemen of Verona.' But even if the latter pair must be dismissed as comparative failures, they contain the promise of his later success with comedies in the same vein. And failures as they may be termed, they are not inferior to any comedy already composed by any other English dramatist. It is a curious fact

that comedy has everywhere developed more cautiously than tragedy, as though it had a difficult task to discover its true field. Sophocles had found a final model for tragedy long before Aristophanes composed his shapeless lyrical-burlesques, commingled of many incongruous elements which later comedy was to eject. Corneille climbed swiftly to the height of tragedy, while his attempts at comedy were hesitating. And it was only after a repeated variety of tentative essays that Molière was enabled at last to achieve the fit framework for his spacious representation of manners and morals.

Shakspere came comparatively early in the development of the English drama; and in comedy, at least, he was but little aided by what his predecessors had been able to do. Marlowe had given power to the chronicle-play; and Shakspere found this ready to his hand. But no man of genuine comic gift had devised an adequate method for the humorous portrayal of life. There is felicity in the dialogue of Lyly's courtly pieces composed to be acted by boys; but there is no heartiness of fun in his delicately devised stories and no breadth of comic characterization. Greene and Peele have moments when they seem to foresee what comedy might become; but this is a fleeting vision only and never a solid fact, since they lacked the sense of form and revealed no constructive skill.

This is at once the explanation and the excuse for Shakspere's hesitancy in these earliest comedies. He was groping for a formula of comedy which no one of his contemporaries had attempted. They had left him no satisfactory pattern to follow, and he had to seek it for himself. There is an immense advantage to any artist—whatever his craft—when he can adopt a frame acceptable to his public and thus feel himself free to concentrate

his full effort on what he will fill it with. He is relieved from uncertainty and can give his mind wholly to the matter, taking over the manner to which his audience is already accustomed.

In the nineteenth century in France, for example, we perceive that Scribe developed a formula which proved to be exactly suited to the needs of Augier and the younger Dumas when they began their careers as dramatists. They promptly borrowed his method, even though they might immediately modify this to suit their own different aims. Ibsen, in his turn, found awaiting him the pattern prepared by Augier and Dumas; he began where they left off, rising to heights to which they did not aspire, but enabled to do this only because he could stand on their shoulders.

Shakspere unfortunately could find no helpful pattern in the comedies of his predecessors; and as a result he never achieved the true comedy-of-manners, the humorous play of which the action is caused by the conflict of character with character. He left this to be accomplished later by Molière. But Shakspere was able in time to perfect for his own use the formula of his own romantic-comedy, a story of young lovers wooing and mating, set off against a tale of dark intrigue, which sustained and strengthened the slighter fabric of his central theme. And perhaps the chief interest which 'Love's Labour's Lost' and the 'Two Gentlemen of Verona' have for us now is that they may be considered as Shakspere's earliest ventures into the field of romantic-comedy. They may be regarded as preliminary sketches for the finished pictures of his maturity. Biron gives us a foretaste of the fuller flavor of Benedick; and Julia is a forerunner of the more poetic and more pathetic Viola.

CHAPTER V

HIS EARLIEST CHRONICLE-PLAYS

I

In these earlier comedies Shakspere is experimenting in construction and studying how to put together plots able to arrest and to retain the interest of the spectators who sat on the stage or who stood in the yard below. Apparently he feels the need of a well-knit sequence of situations to hold together a story which lacks the support of a historic figure. But he is not subject to this pressure when he returns to the popular chronicle-play. He is satisfied to take the loose-jointed piece of this type as he found it, with "its scenes succeeding each other in arbitrary fashion, like the slides of a magic lantern." This apt phrase is M. Jusserand's; and he adds that "one wonders at moments if the showman has not mistaken his slides and used some of them in the wrong order."

In 'Richard III,' 'Richard II' and 'King John,' the three earlier chronicle-plays composed not long after the four earlier comedies, Shakspere accepts the method of the living picture-book. He is content to utilize the insecure framework of a historical novel cut into dialogue. In preparing these plays he apparently accepts no obligation to relate the straggling episodes to a central action and to mold the whole story into a harmonious whole. The most that he strives for, or at least, the most that he

attains, is the arbitrary unity due to a coercive central character; and in doing this he is abiding by the example of Marlowe, whose influence upon him is more obvious in 'Richard III' and in 'Richard II' than in 'King John' or in any other of his later plays. Perhaps the comparative absence of humor from these pieces is also a result of Marlowe's example. The chronicle-play inherited from the mystery the habit of commingling comic scenes with serious episodes; Shakspere had just made four ventures into comedy, but in these three historical pieces he is sparing of humor. He was later to make up for this reserve in the two parts of 'Henry IV' which are dominated by the exuberant personality of Falstaff.

"Shakspere and Molière wished above all things to make money by their theaters," so Goethe once remarked to Eckermann; "and in order to attain this, their principal aim, they necessarily strove that everything should be as good as possible, and that, besides good old pieces, there should be some clever novelty to please and to attract." In the four earlier comedies Shakspere had aimed at the clever novelty; and in two of the three chronicle-plays which immediately followed he goes back to the good old pieces. The old pieces that he chose to rehandle might not be very good, but they had been tried and tested in the theater; and they could be improved by a more careful utilization of the annals in which their authors had found their material. In 'Richard III' Shakspere strengthens the story of the old piece with effects suggested to him by a study of Holinshed; in 'King John' he condenses into a single play an old piece in two parts, adding little of his own so far as incident is concerned, but amplifying salient characters out of bare hints dropped by the historian; and in 'Richard II'

he seems to have been supported by no preceding play, finding his material directly in history itself, and shaping it in accord with the pattern set by Marlowe in 'Edward II.'

John Stuart Mill declared that Shakspere, to his contemporaries, is, first of all, "a marvelous story-teller" on the stage. By this marvelous gift of story-telling on the stage, he can transmute the dull lead of the annals into the shining gold of a chronicle-play, certain to please audiences to whom such formless pieces were still unfailingly attractive. He casts out unhesitatingly whatever the historic narrative may proffer which he finds unfit for his purpose; he condenses the duration of the action in reckless disregard of historic accuracy; he besprinkles the story with all the spectacular effects possible on his sceneless stage; he is liberal in combats and lavish in chopping off heads to be brought in dripping that they may sate the Elizabethan lust for blood; and he is prolific in sheeted ghosts, rising gory-throated to thrill the strong-nerved public with its medieval relish for bloodshed. Above all, he brings to life the old historic figures: he vivifies them with the increasing energy of his creative imagination; and often he endows them with lofty eloquence.

In Shakspere's hands the chronicle-play is contrived to please all kinds of spectators; it is filled with incessant movement, it abounds in vigorous emotion and it is populated by sharply contrasted characters. There is no occasion for wonder that the Elizabethans liked the chronicle-play, however lacking in dramatic unity it may seem to us now. They knew nothing better, since a true tragedy had scarcely been developed out of it and since a liberal comedy had not yet been evolved by its side. It gave

them the kind of pleasure which they sought in the playhouse; and at its best it was better than the even looser and more careless pieces to which they had long been accustomed. It generally possessed that clash of will which the drama demands, even though this collision was sometimes only a historic controversy.

II

Of all Shakspere's chronicle-plays, 'Richard III' has had the most undeniable and enduring popularity; the frequency of quarto editions is evidence of its persistent appeal to his contemporaries; and its constant reappearance in our theaters to-day is proof that its power is still potent over latter-day playgoers. The reasons for this abiding popularity are not far to seek. The play may be what it has been called, "thoroughly melodramatic in conception and execution"; but it is a most moving melodrama, stiffened by the sinister figure of Richard, stern of will, knowing what he wants and why he wants it and how to get it—a type of remorseless depravity and of ruthless ambition, an inconceivable monster of misdirected energy. Alone in the study to-day we may dismiss him as excessive, as unconvincing, as out of nature, as a stage villain daubed in harsh colors; but when we sit massed in the theater even now the violent volition of this monster still carries us along. We may be incredulous; yet we are swept forward in spite of our repeated protests against the absence of plausibility and against the hopelessly primitive mechanism. Monstrous as Richard may be when he is considered as a recognizable human being, he is a splendid acting part, rich in striking possibilities for the actor who is physically competent. The per-

former is not called upon for the exercise of any intellectual subtlety; he needs chiefly voice and intensity; and he is sustained sturdily by the masterful activity of Richard himself, resolute and self-reliant, unhesitating and unscrupulous.

'Richard III' is a chronicle-play which has many of the characteristics and much of the theatrical effectiveness of the tragedy-of-blood. It is still a history, but it is almost a tragedy in the closer construction of its plot. Ordinarily a chronicle-play has a scattered story with but little crescendo of action; the events happen along one after another, with no unifying motive. But the successive episodes of 'Richard III' are knit together by Queen Margaret's comprehensive curse, which is worked out act by act and scene by scene, and which is recalled in turn by every victim of Richard's ferocity, always foreboding again the fate of those it has not yet overtaken. The curse itself is only a clever piece of rhetorical invective, but it is taken seriously by all the characters, and it serves to foreshadow the impending doom of all it has included—a doom slow of execution, but ultimately inexorable. Since revising 'Titus Andronicus' and the three parts of 'Henry VI,' Shakspere had composed four comedies, in two of which he had adroitly articulated the skeleton of plot; and possibly this experience prompted him to give to 'Richard III' a more consistent motive than the spectators had been accustomed to expect in a chronicle-play.

Although 'Richard III' marks an advance in dramaturgic dexterity over 'Henry VI,' its methods are still primitive. The exposition is accomplished by an opening soliloquy of Richard's, followed almost immediately by three or four other speeches of his, frankly directed to the

spectators, in which he declares himself for the villain he is and proclaims his evil purposes. There is no psychologic veracity in these self-revelatory soliloquies. It is inconceivable that Richard should so completely admit to himself that he is a villain and confess that he is "subtle, false and treacherous." To make him say this to the audience is to put in his mouth, not any opinion that he might possibly hold of himself, but the opinion of every outside commentator on his character. Yet primitive as this device is and contradicting as it does all that we know about human self-deception, it is useful theatrically. It poses Richard clearly before the spectators and they can have thereafter no doubt as to what manner of man he is. It presages an interesting struggle and it excites expectancy; it sets before us a bold, bad man; and it makes us ask ourselves what he is going to do next.

We can, if we please, follow the story, episode by episode, and pick out scene after scene which lacks justification when tried by the test of common sense. Yet none of them are out of keeping with the tone that Shakspere deliberately adopts; and they are all of them histrionically effective. There is little craft in Richard's sudden throwing over of Buckingham, who has just seated him on the throne; but it is precisely the swift retribution which an audience enjoys when this befalls an accessory, in anticipation of its also befalling the villain-in-chief. There is a total absence of plausibility in Richard's successful wooing of Anne as she follows the body of a man he has murdered; but the very violence of the contrast is startling; only the swiftness of Anne's conversion is out of character, since her change of heart is not in itself impossible, if time were but given for it. Shakspere is so satisfied with the effect of this scene that he repeats it a

little later, when he shows Richard wheedling Elizabeth (who, like Anne, begins by cursing him) into wooing her daughter for him. There is patent absurdity in Richard's calling on a casual page to get him a ready murderer; this is very much as though he were ringing up a district-messenger to fetch a licensed member of the assassins' union; but unnatural as this is in fact, it is quite in keeping with the rest of the play; it is exactly what the audience expects from Richard as Shakspere places him before us in this play. There is the same unhesitating use of primitive devices in the procession of eleven ghosts on the eve of Bosworth Field, blessing Richmond and banning Richard; but this again bears on the immediate issue of the battle, arousing the interest of expectancy and evoking the suggestion of fate.

The style of the play is curiously uneven. Sometimes it is tedious with the empty rhetorical trivialities the Elizabethans seem to have liked, full of merely verbal quibbles, and of wearisome turnings and twistings of the same thought. Richard's long soliloquy after his dream of the ghosts is a pseudo-logical argument wholly devoid of real feeling. The oration of Richard and that of Richmond before the battle are each a variation of the traditional address, rising now and again into real eloquence. The wailing of the queens and of the children in the second act is almost an operatic concerted piece, one voice repeating in altered phrases with carefully balanced antithesis what the preceding voice has uttered; and although the sentiment is genuine enough we fail to catch the accent of sincerity. And then, here and there, if all too infrequently, there flash out sentences of the true Shaksperian quality, as when Richard comments on a reported remark of the young king's, "So wise so young,

they say, do never live long"; and when Richard, after the reconciliations, discloses the fact of Clarence's death, to the general consternation, and Buckingham asks, "Look I so pale, Lord Dorset, as the rest?"

III

In 'Richard III' the action is mainly external; it scarcely even hints at the true tragedy which lies hidden in the soul of man. It is a rushing tumult of incessant assassinations, dominated by a monster of iniquity, and we sit silent as he wades through blood to the throne. In 'Richard II' the spirit of the scene changes, although we are made again to follow the rise of a usurper. 'Richard II' is defective in the very qualities in which 'Richard III' abounds; and it is endowed with the very qualities which 'Richard III' is without. That is to say, 'Richard II' is rich in truthful character-delineation and it is poor not only in theatrical effect, but in essential dramatic force. Richard III is energetic and strong-willed and Richard II is yielding and weak-willed; and as a result the former is a fit figure for a play, while the latter is an impossible hero for the drama which can interest only when it sets before us the contention of wilful personalities.

'Richard II' lacks action; it is barren in striking situations; events merely happen and are not brought about by deliberate intent. The movement is sluggish, and it is epic or even elegiac rather than dramatic. Richard lets his crown slip from his head without making a good fight for it; and Bolingbroke, who puts himself upon the throne, is permitted to become king rather because of the feebleness of Richard than because of his own strength. The

usurper succeeds not so much by his own stern resolve as by the accident of circumstance. In other words, the play as a play is weakened by a dearth of dramatic motive, of that naked assertion of the human will which is ever the most potent force in the theater. Macready, judging the play from the actor's standpoint (which is always valuable when we seek to weigh purely theatric merit), points out that the piece has not been able to keep the stage although often applauded in the acting. He notes that no one of the characters does anything to cause a result; all seem floated along the tides of circumstance and "nothing has its source in premeditation." And he adds that "in all the greater plays of Shakspere purpose and will, the general foundations of character, are the engines which set action at work. In 'Richard II' we look for these in vain. Macbeth, Othello, Iago, Hamlet, Richard III, both think and do; but Richard II, Bolingbroke, York and the rest, though they talk so well, do little else than talk, nor can all the charm of composition redeem, in a dramatic point of view, the weakness resulting from this accident in a play's construction."

There is cause for wonder that immediately after composing a play of compact theatricality like 'Richard III' Shakspere should be so neglectful of dramatic force in 'Richard II,' repeating the mistake he had made in the ineffective 'Two Gentlemen of Verona' immediately after the artfully constructed 'Comedy of Errors.' Possibly the explanation of the dramaturgic weakness of 'Richard II' is to be found in the fact that he did not have the support of any previous play to supply suggestions for improvement. Shakspere seems to have been sluggish of invention—or at least to have exerted his ingenuity most easily when he had an old piece to better as best he could.

Possibly it may be that his artistic interest was so centered in the character of Richard himself that he failed to perceive the need of a bold action to display the figure of the pliant king. If this is the case, he was then doing what Molière did later, when the French dramatist allowed his overmastering interest in the Misanthrope himself to blind him to the insufficiency of the dramatic story in which Alceste was the central character. Yet the 'Misanthrope' might have been supplied with a dramatic structure as powerful as that of 'Tartuffe,' since Alceste himself is a strong-willed character, whereas the task of finding a truly dramatic framework to set off the slack-minded Richard II is almost hopeless. And thus we are led to the conclusion that Shakspere's initial error was in choosing a theme incapable of truly dramatic treatment. This is added evidence of the truth of Voltaire's remark that the success of a tragedy depends, first of all, upon the choice of its subject.

While it cannot be denied that the central figure of this tragic history is fundamentally undramatic, and that the story of his fall is but sparsely supplied with stirring situations, Shakspere is ever Shakspere; and there is no play of his which has not its superb moments. Quite in keeping with the king's irresolute character is the sudden rage which fires him to slay with his own hand two of the men who have come to murder him. And in the earlier episode of his yielding up the crown, there is both psychologic truth and theatrical effect when he sends for a mirror to see "the face that like the sun did make beholders wink," only to dash the glass to the ground, thereby showing Bolingbroke that his glory is as brittle as the face reflected in the mirror. Perhaps it may be worth recalling that, in a poetic drama by M. Rostand, 'L'Aiglon,'

another royal weakling, too infirm of purpose for the burden that is laid upon his shoulders, also looks at his face in a mirror, only to shatter the glass in disgust.

When the weakness of 'Richard II' as a play is once admitted, only praise can be bestowed upon the character-delineation, especially upon the wonderful felicity with which the peculiar personality of Richard is portrayed. Shakspere here discloses a psychologic insight of which he had given little evidence in any earlier piece. The truthfulness with which Richard II is depicted is in marked contrast with the lack of truth in the painting of Richard III. Shakspere seems to have been attracted by the problem of presenting a king who should be kingly and yet devoid of the attributes of a real ruler. Richard II is an unusual character drawn with unusual art. He is a specialist in self-pity, a dilettant in self-torture, reveling in the luxury of woe and seeking his happiness in being unhappy. He is unceasing in dissecting his own sad plight and in moralizing upon his own misery. At bottom he is a contemptible creature, delineated with a perfect understanding of his morbid individuality. He is cruel and grasping and heartless; and yet he is exuberant in sympathy for himself. He is the embodiment of pathetic helplessness, a masterpiece of psychologic veracity. And it is in the play in which he appears that it is possible to perceive, for the first time, that wonderful understanding of human nature which was to make Shakspere the greatest of dramatists.

IV

In 'King John' Shakspere appropriates an old play in two parts and condenses it, without taking pains to make the story coherent or compact. In speech and in character he betters what he borrows; as M. Jusserand has suggested, "it is a case of the eagle donning the jackdaw's feathers." With these feathers he is content to skim close to the ground and not to soar aloft on his own strong pinions. The piece is a mere medley of scarcely related scenes, following each other almost in confusion, sometimes powerful in themselves, but even then less potent than they might be if they were properly coördinated and firmly knit together. There is nothing to rivet the attention of the spectators except contrasted characters and abundant eloquence; and in a play these are inadequate substitutes for a controlling motive or for a dominating figure. As Aristotle had asserted many centuries earlier, "if you string together a set of speeches expressive of character, and well finished in point of diction and thought, you will not produce the essential tragic effect nearly as well as with a play, which, however deficient in these respects, yet has a plot and artistically constructed incidents."

Plot and artistically constructed incidents had been lacking in most of the chronicle-plays which Shakspere was following; and yet these earlier pieces had often a forward movement absent from 'King John,' because Shakspere fails to provide any single character to focus our interest. A chronicle-play it is, with all the looseness of that easy form; but a chronicle-play is only a kaleidoscope of battle, murder and sudden death unless

it has a central figure, like Richard III or Henry V, to compel our interest. In 'King John' the action is wandering and uncertain; it is even more fragmentary than that of 'Richard II'; and it is wholly without the huddled swiftness of 'Richard III.' Furthermore, King John himself, although not so absolutely unfit to be the leading personage of a play as Richard II, is not so presented as to grip our sympathy; and Faulconbridge, the valiant braggart, who is set before us with assured mastery, is external to the story, such as it is.

The opening scenes cheat us with the belief that Faulconbridge is to take a prominent place in the plot, and we are disappointed when we find that this is impossible, since he is only an outsider, involved in no important situation and useful at best only to give color to certain scenes and to comment upon the events like a chorus. Faulconbridge is a largely conceived character with Shakspere's unfailing appreciation of a free and unconventional nature; and Shakspere lends him wit, shrewdness and even eloquence; yet his best bravura passages have but little dramatic value, since he is not firmly tied into the action. He exists for his own sake—for the sake of the vivacity and the variety his presence imparts to the scenes in which he appears. He is a pleasant fellow of an easy and contagious mirth; he has a captivating humor of his own, forecasting that of Mercutio; but his part is so loosely related to the action that he cannot be forced into prominence.

'King John' is curiously incongruous in the carelessness of its composition. It is in the main a drum-and-trumpet history, with the flourishes of heralds, the challenges to instant battle and the sudden settling of a war by the unexpected betrothal of a prince and a princess who

have never before met—a betrothal impertinently proposed by a private citizen and incontinently accepted by the warring kings. Then the fight breaks out again, when the Cardinal most unexpectedly intervenes; the French invade England with the aid of the English nobles, who suddenly turn against them when they are told that the Dauphin has inexplicably planned their needless assassination. The death of King John by poison is casual; it has not been prepared for by the dramatist, and it is therefore feeble in dramatic effect.

The railings and the ravings of Queen Elinor and Queen Constance are unseemly; they are unqueenly, if not unwomanly. At times, these two widows of dead kings are little better than a couple of common scolds, with an unbridled license of speech that even Queen Elizabeth might have thought excessive. Of the two, Constance is the more violent, as she has good reason to be; her later outbreaks are hysteric, even if they are the result of maternal devotion. She is superb in mother-love and eloquent in high-sounding words; but her temper is painfully shrewish and she revels in her opportunities for vehement protest. Her violence therefore detracts not a little from the pathos of her plight, and even from the appeal of her heartfelt plaints. Overdone as they seem to us now, her swelling invectives, excited by a natural emotion, must have been grateful to the boy-actor intrusted with the part (possibly the same youthful performer who was soon to be intrusted with Katherine in the 'Taming of the Shrew').

The characters, however overdrawn they may be and however external to the action, in so far as there is any action, are admirably depicted. They are living men and women; they are no longer merely parts, sketched in

outline, to be colored by the personality of the performer; they are truly characters, standing on their own feet and speaking out of their own mouths. The gift of endowing his creations with life itself, of which Shakspere gave little sign in his earliest plays, is now at last displayed. Equally undeniable is his gift of handling a pathetic situation with a full understanding of its possibilities. Nothing that he had done in any earlier piece foretold the psychologic subtlety of the scene in which King John suggests to Hubert the murder of Arthur or the compassionate handling of the scene in which Hubert undertakes to put out Arthur's eyes and is overcome by the little prince's irresistibly moving plea for mercy. And yet note must be made of the fact that in Shakspere's play the project of putting out Arthur's eyes is wholly gratuitous; what King John wanted and what Hubert had undertaken to do was to make away with Arthur; and there was no possible excuse for blinding him before killing him. Shakspere is amplifying a hint he found in the old play, but he carelessly omits the passage in the old play which justified the scene. Probably the episode took shape as it did partly because of the well-known delight the Elizabethan playgoers had in beholding ghastly spectacles of mutilation and torture—a violent delight which Shakspere again procured them by the plucking out of Gloucester's eyes in the later 'King Lear.'

V

It is as poet and as psychologist, as a writer of soaring speeches and of pathetic phrases, and as a creator of living characters that Shakspere in these three early chronicle-histories proves that he has outgrown the writer of the

four early comedies. It is not as a playwright that he has improved, since we cannot help admitting his failure to give to these histories the straightforward movement of which the chronicle-play was capable. Even though he has advanced as a poet, he has not yet discovered the full value of blank verse and its superiority over rime as an instrument for dramatic utterance. In all three of these pieces rime is not infrequent; now and again it is even abundant. We find it generally in couplets, but occasionally even in quatrains; and we find it where it is not helpful, in scenes wherein there is really no lyric note to which rime might be more or less appropriate.

We note also that, although Shakspere can now breathe the breath of life into his creatures, he has failed to provide any one of these three plays with a broadly humorous character or with scenes of rollicking fun, such as were common enough in the chronicle-plays of his predecessors. Richard III has a sardonic humor of his own; but it is not laughter that he arouses in us. Faulconbridge is pleasantly gay in manner and playfully lively in speech; but he is only a clever commentator, ready with satiric remarks upon the shifting spectacle of life as it passes before his eyes; and he is not entangled in any amusing situation of his own, out of which he might be extricated by his ready wit. This absence of humor, of hearty comic character and of episodes funny in themselves must be regarded as not a little curious, since Shakspere was soon to return to the chronicle-play with the two parts of 'Henry IV' filled by the huge bulk of the incomparable Falstaff, and with 'Henry V,' wherein he provided a varied group of comic characters.

Shakspere was still in the period of youthful experimentation and he had not yet discovered how to make

the most of his material. In two of his earlier comedies he had proved that he could already construct a coherent plot and in two of these earlier chronicle-plays he has shown that he could already draw characters of an indisputable humanity. But he was as yet modestly unconscious of his own ability to compose a well-built play which should also be carried on by characters of immitigable truth to life. Apparently his full ambition had not yet waked. Certainly there is little in the four comedies already considered or in these three chronicle-plays which foretold the sudden and superb outflowering of his genius in 'Romeo and Juliet.' Of course, the exact sequence in which he composed his plays is not yet definitely ascertained; and quite possibly the order in which they have here been considered is not beyond cavil. And yet the more carefully we consider Shakspere's dramaturgic workmanship, his slow acquisition of the craft of playmaking, the more assurance can we feel that the four comedies and these three chronicle-plays preceded 'Romeo and Juliet' and were the preparation for it.

CHAPTER VI

'ROMEO AND JULIET'

The earliest of Shakspere's indisputable masterpieces is 'Romeo and Juliet.' It is, as M. Jusserand observes, "the first work in which the dramatist fully reveals himself—the tragic, the comic, the tender, the jocose, the marvelous, the incomparable poet." No one of the plays which preceded it gave promise of his ultimate supremacy in tragedy; and only two of them, the 'Midsummer Night's Dream' and 'Richard III,' each in its own way, really contributed to his lasting reputation. 'Romeo and Juliet' is the first of his plays to withstand completely the double test of the stage and the study, established firmly in the theater and held in highest esteem in the library. It is seen frequently in our playhouses to-day and always to the delight of the main body of the playgoing public; and it is read by countless thousands who rarely enter the doors of a theater and who do not think of it as a play to be acted but rather as the undying poem of young love in the springtime of life. It is perhaps the play of Shakspere's which is best known, or at least most widely known, outside of the confines of the English language; that is to say, it was the earliest of his tragedies to attain cosmopolitan fame.

It is not the loftiest or the mightiest effort of his tragic genius; but it is the most universal in the wide appeal of its pathetic story. It is the eternal tale of youthful love rushing to its fate, a tale fiery with passion and yet chilly

with the sense of impending doom. It is at once epic in its sweep, lyric in its fervor and dramatic in its intensity, with a pervading note of romance not surpassed in any of his later and greater tragedies. As Coleridge declared, "it is a spring day, gusty and beautiful in the morn, and closing like an April evening with the song of the nightingale."

The popularity of 'Romeo and Juliet' with all sorts and conditions of men and in all parts of the modern world is evidence that in its composition the poet and the playwright worked in loyal collaboration. Sometimes Shakspere is happy-go-lucky in his plotting, as in 'King John'; and sometimes when he has put his structure together with cautious skill, as in the 'Comedy of Errors,' he is willing to rely mainly on the plot for the interest of his play. He does his best as poet and as playwright both only when his heart is in his work and when his interest is deeply aroused by his theme. Indeed, his effort seems to be in proportion to the attraction exerted on him by the subject he is at work on. He is often casual and careless in his choice of material, apparently taking whatever chances to be nearest at hand and descending to stories as unworthy of his genius as those which he borrowed later as the basis of 'All's Well that Ends Well' and 'Measure for Measure.' When the material he has accepted is not really worth while (as in these two so-called comedies), his artistic endeavor is relaxed and he fails to exert his full energy; he does what he has to do in the easiest way, moving along the line of least resistance and letting the unfortunate story construct itself as best it can.

It is only those pieces wherein he discovers a topic really stimulating to his imagination that demand his ut-

most endeavor; and it is only in such pieces that he is nerved to put forth his whole strength both as playwright and as poet. There are only half a dozen or half a score of these plays in which we can perceive the working of all his powers at their fullest possibilities; and in them alone do we see him taking the utmost pains, toiling over his technic, setting his characters firmly on their feet, and endowing them with exuberant vitality. When he is intensely interested in the theme of a play, tragic or comic, his energy kindles and he spares no trouble to present the story to most complete advantage and to get out of it all that can be expressed from it. He lingers lovingly over the always difficult problems of construction, spending himself freely on exposition and contrast and climax, and achieving a deeper meaning as a reward for his artistic conscientiousness.

That he should have attained an elevated standard on these occasions is more remarkable than that he should more often have fallen below it. Plays were then intended solely for the two hours' traffic of the stage; they were held up to the mark by no pressure of competent criticism; they could expect no supporting praise other than the plaudits of the theater. Shakspere had before him when he composed 'Romeo and Juliet' no model of tragedy to arouse his ambition to rivalry, and no competitor pressing close at his heels. To the Elizabethan playwright the stimulus to attain the highest plane of purely artistic excellence was never external; it had to be internal, within himself; it had to be aroused by his own interest in the alluring subject which had then captivated his ardent attention. When Shakspere has such a subject, as he had in 'Romeo and Juliet,' he works as one inspired, for his own sake, for his own delight in

his sheer artistry, for the joy of the deed itself; and he achieves a technical beauty, a balanced proportion, a masterly structure, a massive movement, irresistible and inevitable, and a perfect harmony of the whole, such as can be matched only in the major plays of Sophocles and Molière.

It is quite possible that he builded better than he knew, and that he did not suspect the full value of what he was doing. He may not have been conscious that in 'Romeo and Juliet' he was creating the earliest model of English tragedy. He may have supposed that he was only putting on the stage in the fashion most likely to interest an Elizabethan audience, an Italian tale which had interested him. He may have intended only to prepare a novel in action and in dialogue, such as other playwrights were producing about that time. None the less he was able to give it a unity which no other playwright had striven for. Thereby he achieved a tragedy which, however different in its method from that of the Greeks, was in essential accord with the requirements of Aristotle. "Tragedy," as the great Greek critic defined it, "is the imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude"; having a beginning, a middle and an end; "being in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of the emotions."

The action of 'Romeo and Juliet' is action and not narrative; it is serious and of a certain magnitude; it is complete, having a beginning, a middle and an end; and through pity and fear it effects the proper purgation of the emotions. We may go further and insist that it has also the unity which Aristotle demanded from Greek tragedy—not the pseudo-unities of Time and Place,

which the Italian critics had falsely deduced from their misreading of Aristotle's treatise, but that unity of Action, of story, which is imperative in all the arts. And this tragedy of Shakspere's has also the equally important unity of tone which characterizes the greatest of Greek plays; all its episodes and all its figures are in unison with its theme; they are all coherent and consistent; they all serve to elucidate and to illuminate.

II

The certainty of Aristotle's insight into the essential precepts of playmaking, eternal through the long centuries, the same to-day as in the days of Elizabeth and in the more distant days of Pericles, is revealed again in his declaration of the superior importance of construction in a tragedy over character delineation and poetic embellishment. "The plot, then, is the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of tragedy; character holds the second place." This is one of his wise sayings, and here is another: "Novices in the art are able to elaborate their diction and ethical portraiture before they can frame their incidents; it is the same with all early poets." There is no lack of diction, of ethical portraiture, of character in 'Romeo and Juliet,' but these are made effective by the framing of the incidents into a plot which would rivet the attention of the spectators even if the dialogue were but fustian and the characters but puppets.

Shakspere finds the story complete in 'Romeo and Juliet,' a tedious poem in long-drawn and lumbering lines, by one Arthur Brooke, who had refashioned a French elaboration of an earlier Italian tale. The base metal of Brooke's rimed narrative Shakspere transmutes into the

pure gold of his immortal tragedy by means of an endless succession of modifications of all sorts—condensations, suppressions, transpositions and amplifications—all displaying an unerring feeling for dramatic effect. The whole story is in Brooke's poem, hidden beneath tawdry rhetoric and trivial verbiage, but the keen eye of a born playwright was needed to perceive the theatrical possibilities of the action inchoate in the pedestrian verse of Brooke. There could scarcely be found a more instructive study in the art of playmaking than the consideration of the reasons for the manifold changes which Shakspere makes in the material that he borrows wholesale. He clarifies the action by simplifying it. He heightens it by hastening its movement. He compresses it into a very few days, instead of letting it linger along for several months. He imparts to it a breathless speed, which rolls it irresistible to its inevitable culmination. He arranges the sequence of events, building up the successive situations so that each of them seems to grow naturally out of the one that went before and to prepare the way for the one that comes after. He eschews narrative altogether and lets the spectators see for themselves everything which they need to know. He brings all the characters early on the stage, so that we recognize them when they reappear later as the stress of emotion gets tenser and tenser.

When we compare the masterly plot of 'Romeo and Juliet' with the fragmentary construction of the serious plays which had preceded it, we may be moved to wonder at the sudden development of Shakspere's structural skill. The explanation is to be found in the fact that he had exhibited the same kind of skill in two of his comedies. The principles of playmaking are the same in comedy and in tragedy, however different the ultimate effect may

be. Shakspere had practised his hand in weaving the intricate imbroglio of the 'Comedy of Errors' and in combining the fantastic misadventures of the 'Midsummer Night's Dream'; and these experiences in the construction of comedy stood him in stead when he worked out the crescendo of tragic situations in 'Romeo and Juliet.' The results are as unlike as may be, but the method is identical; and admirable as is the mechanism of this first great tragedy, it is not better in its kind than the machinery which functions so felicitously in the 'Comedy of Errors.' Of course, there is not only the wide difference between tragedy and comedy, there is also the more important divergence due to the fact that the early farce has little or no other merit than the deft ingenuity of its plot, whereas the tragedy is dowered with poetry no less than with psychology, and its lovely story moves forward so smoothly that its artful mechanism is unsuspected until we set ourselves deliberately to spy out its secrets.

Shakspere reveals here a constructive skill, surpassing anything yet seen on the English stage, a dramaturgic dexterity he was to employ again later in a scant half-dozen of his succeeding tragedies. He is here dealing with one theme only, large enough to sustain a whole play without admixture of any subplot; and he is satisfied with his single story. He sees the full value of it, and he so handles it as to get out of it all possible effect. He knows exactly what he means to do and he does it, without hesitation or uncertainty. He neglects none of the episodes that must be shown to the spectators, the *scènes à faire*, as Sarcey called them, setting forth the collision of opposing volitions, and decisive of the result—those, therefore, that an audience vaguely expects, being dumbly disappointed when it fails to find them. He

starts no false clues and he wastes no time in by-paths. He puts in no scene which can be spared and he omits no scene which is integral to the plot. He avoids all improbability, making clear the motive for every deed and every speech and making sure that this motive is not only plausible but immediately acceptable without cavil or even consideration. All the characters move forward naturally, obeying the law of their own being, saying and doing exactly what they would naturally say and do. Every episode is tense with increasing suspense; and no episode is marred by the disconcerting shock of mere surprise.

No part of the play demands higher praise for its stagecraft than the exposition, the scene in which we are taken with swift certainty into the center of the story. Shakspere can be, when he chooses, a master of exposition, as he was to prove in 'Hamlet,' 'Othello' and 'Macbeth'; but effectively as those plays begin and skilfully as the attention of the spectators is caught almost with the opening words, no one of them surpasses 'Romeo and Juliet' in this respect. That the devoted lovers shall fall in love at first sight under the shadow of impending doom, we need to know about the long-standing feud of the Capulets and the Montagues before Juliet and Romeo first lay eyes on each other. We do not need to know the origin of the quarrel, and this Shakspere does not trouble to declare. But we are made to behold the feud flaming up again out of its ashes, almost without an exciting cause and only in consequence of the predisposition of both sides to immediate conflagration.

Two serving-men of the Montagues, none too valiant, happen upon two serving-men of the Capulets, and bandy words with them. Encouraged by the arrival of Ben-

volio, they go a little too far; and Benvolio is striving to allay their strife when the fiery Tybalt bursts in to challenge the calm-blooded Benvolio. With the rumor of the fighting, the officers of the law appear. Then the elder Capulet and the elder Montague rush out eager to attack each other. And when the broil is at its height the Prince comes on sternly to command an instant cessation of hostilities. In his reproof to the warring chiefs the Prince puts the spectators in possession of all the facts of the case, the long-standing hostility of the two families, the frequent faction-fights, and the severe penalty for any future breaking of the peace.

III

Our interest in a play when we see it presented in the theater is almost in proportion to the sharpness of the struggle which animates the story. To this sharpness is due the ease with which we can apprehend this conflict, and the sympathy thereby aroused, leading us to take sides with one or the other of the combatants. In 'Romeo and Juliet' hero and heroine alike, and to an equal degree, have wills of their own and know their own minds and are bent on having their own way. They are not only wilful, but headstrong, and so they rush straight to their doom. By their implacable purpose they sustain the action from the beginning to the end. Nor are hero and heroine alone in this characteristic. Capulet is a masterful man, insistent in coercion; he is the fit father for Juliet, and she is truly his daughter. Tybalt is equally impetuous in asserting himself, volcanic and irreconcilable. The Prince is firm in resolve and prompt in action. Even Friar Lawrence is unhesitating in the successive

steps he takes in aid of the ill-starred lovers. Almost every character in the play is forthputting and intolerant of opposition, determined to do what he has decided, regardless of the consequences to others or to himself.

The characters are not only boldly individual, they are also boldly contrasted—perhaps almost too obviously. The two servants of the Montagues are set over against the two servants of the Capulets. The effervescent Tybalt is put in juxtaposition, first with the reserved Benvolio, and then a little later with the gallant Mercutio, who may not desire a quarrel but who does not put it from him—as Romeo does for a little space, moved by his affection for Juliet, which for the moment includes all her kin. The broad garrulity of the Nurse is contrasted with the maternal dignity of Lady Capulet and with the impatient fervor of Juliet. And Juliet's other bridegroom, the County Paris, is brought forward as Romeo's rival—a rivalry which culminates at last in a duel to the death on the steps of Juliet's tomb. It may be admitted that on analysis these several antitheses are almost too many and too frequent; they are the result of a craftsmanship not yet quite sure of itself and therefore careful to fortify itself at every possible point. But they all help to make the essential struggle clearer and keener, and to make the collision of will more immediate, more incessant and more effective.

Having a story which he delights in setting on the stage, superbly dramatic in itself and eternally powerful in its appeal to the playgoer, having peopled this story with characters dramatic in themselves, having contrasted these characters with almost excessive precaution, having devised a masterly exposition, Shakspere neglects none of the other tools of the playwright. Above

all, he takes infinite pains in the proper preparation of his successive episodes. This is the earliest of his serious plays in which he discloses adequately and abundantly what a French critic has aptly termed "the properly dramatic side of his genius, that is, the art of linking the scenes together, of making us feel what atmosphere we breathe and among what kind of men we move, of preparing effects and surprises by timely hints, so that we shall indeed be surprised but not startled, and we shall be moved because we can believe." For an example of this artful attainment of instant acceptability we may take the fiery outburst of Tybalt in the opening scene, which poses him before us and tells us exactly what we may expect from him later, so that his picking a quarrel first with Romeo and then with Mercutio seems, when we see it, not only natural but necessary. Natural and necessary also is Romeo's fatal duel with Tybalt, with whom he had at first refused to fight, and who had since killed Romeo's best friend almost under Romeo's eyes. No spectator can fail to feel the tragic irony of this death of Juliet's kinsman by the hand of Romeo on the very day when Juliet and Romeo had been married.

There is the same adroit preparation in the first meeting of the hero and heroine. Romeo's fancy has lightly turned to thoughts of love and he supposes himself enamoured of Rosaline, being thus predisposed for a deeper passion; and Juliet descends to the dance expecting to meet a wooer. Both are ready for the sudden springing up of the flame which was to light their funeral pyre. The balcony scene comes quickly, burning with ardor and heightened by the danger of discovery, which, as Juliet declares, would mean death to Romeo. Even in the delight of this first meeting Juliet foresees the doom that

lowers over their love. "I have no joy of this contract to-night," she exclaims; "it is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden." And Friar Lawrence, a little later, echoes again the note of impending fate: "These violent delights have violent ends." From beginning to end Shakspere makes most skilful use of the element of suspense. We follow every episode in turn with intense interest in the scene itself, and with a breathless fear as to the episode which is to come after.

In no other of his tragedies has Shakspere more skilfully relieved with humor the tension of his serious scenes, now affording a pleasant contrast and again providing the relaxation of laughter to lighten the strain of pathos. The opening episode of the faction fight is begun by a quartet of comic servants. The following scenes are illumined by the coruscating gaiety of Mercutio, soon to be quenched in death. The fierce passion of Juliet is set off by the broad tolerance of the Nurse, coarse, vital, human—the richest of all Shakspere's comic characters between Bottom and Falstaff. The Nurse is all prose and Juliet is all poetry. Nothing could be more characteristic in itself than the Nurse's advice to marry Paris; and it also affords a magnificent opportunity for the expression of the depth of Juliet's passion. This brief scene is at once deeply pathetic and broadly humorous, and it is the more pathetic because of its humor. And then, after Juliet has taken the potion and is reported dead, we have the trivial chatter of the musicians and the servants to loosen the tension and to prolong expectancy.

IV

Attention has here been directed to the articulation of the skeleton of the action, because it is this dexterous construction which supports the story and which is responsible for the enduring success of the play. Moreover, the construction is concealed from most of those who enjoy the tragedy by the beauty of the poetry and by the variety and veracity of the psychology. In no one of Shakspere's earlier plays had he peopled his plot with characters, all of them alive and all of them true to life. It is in this play that, for the first time, he exhibits his supreme power of endowing all his creatures with a vitality of their own. Even the relatively unimportant Benvolio is individual and indisputable; and even the pale profile of the Apothecary, seen only for an instant, etches itself on the memory.

As for the poetry in which the play is bathed, that needs no praise; it is patent to all who hear it. 'Romeo and Juliet' is a true poetic drama, because it is dramatic in theme and dramatic in treatment, as well as poetic in theme and poetic in treatment. A British critic once found fault with Ibsen because he allowed his characters to express themselves in the fittest words rather than in the most beautiful words. What Shakspere achieved more than once, and particularly in this play, is the union of the fittest words and the most beautiful. Juliet and Romeo phrase their passion in most exquisite and melodious verse, and yet they utter only what is exactly appropriate for them to utter. The emotions they express with all the luxuriance of poetry, the thoughts they put into lines of undying felicity, are the very emotions and the very

thoughts they would naturally declare if they were reduced to the bare prose of every-day life.

To say this is not to suggest that Shakspere is always faultless. 'Romeo and Juliet' was composed in his youthful immaturity when he was still subject to the influences of his epoch. There are speeches couched in that high-flown grandiloquence which was common in the stage-diction of the period. Even in certain of Romeo's own utterances (though only in the earlier episodes) we find merely fanciful phrases, far-fetched comparisons, conceit-hunting, quite in the manner of the Elizabethan sonneteers. There is here an impression of mere cleverness for its own sake, perhaps not insincere, but suggesting a sentiment not so deeply felt that it could not be played with for the sheer pleasure of the playing. Even Juliet, when the Nurse tells her "he is dead" and leaves her in doubt whether or not it is Romeo who has gone, at the very height of her anxiety, quibbles on *I* and *ay*, in the taste of the time, which seems to us now false to her surging emotion. The family lamentations over the supposed death of Juliet are artificial, antiphonal, almost operatic. The dialogue is sometimes self-conscious, and therefore to that extent undramatic; and it is sometimes stiff with rhetoric, and therefore to that extent frankly theatric.

Moreover there is a superabundance of rime, not merely in the lyric passages, in which it might have a certain propriety, but in the contemplative and emotional passages where its propriety is not apparent. Romeo's soliloquy in the first act, at the sight of Juliet, is in rime, and so is the soliloquy of Friar Lawrence, in the second act, although it would have been more impressive in the nobler harmony of blank verse. The rimes are in couplets more often than not, and yet there are quat-

rains, scattered here and there throughout the earlier scenes, even in passages devoid of any lyric elevation. Quaintly characteristic of the Elizabethan temper is the arrangement in sonnet-form of the lines which Romeo and Juliet interchange at their first meeting. But Shakspere shows his usual discretion in putting into prose the talk of the servants.

One flaw has been picked in the conduct of the plot—the non-delivery of Friar Lawrence's letter to Romeo in Mantua. This is purely the result of an accident; it is brought about by the long arm of coincidence rather than indicated by the finger of fate. It has been defended on the plea that accident is forever interfering in the affairs of men, and that in real life the unexpected is continually happening. To urge this is to confound the reality of nature with the reality of art. There is no advantage in denying that the reason why Romeo did not receive the letter in time is arbitrary; it is due to the direct intervention of the dramatist himself. But, after all, this is but a trifle; it is only a petty lapse from the inevitability of the tragedy, since we all know that the fate of the lovers is already sealed. Even if this letter had been delivered in time, some other stroke of ill fortune would have prevented Romeo's arrival in season to save Juliet's life. What had to be, had to be; and no one need cavil at the specific accident which brought about what was certain from the very beginning. Violent delights could have only a violent end. Shakespere cleverly conceals his employment of a casual accident by only telling us about it and by not showing us the actual interference with the messenger who bore it. On the stage, narrative makes little impression; and the spectators keep in mind only what they have seen with their own eyes.

CHAPTER VII

THE FALSTAFF PLAYS

I

ALTHOUGH we can never feel sure that we have ascertained the exact order in which Shakspere wrote his pieces, there seems to be little or no doubt that the plays in which Falstaff first figures were composed later than 'Romeo and Juliet,' strange as it may seem that Shakspere should have condescended to the loosely knit chronicle-play after he had achieved the singleness of plot and the directness of action which he had attained in the earliest of his masterly tragedies. And yet the two parts of 'Henry IV,' even if they mark a retrogression in constructive energy, reveal an indisputable advance in power of character-creation. Perhaps Shakspere chose to return to the lax liberty of the chronicle-play because he felt that he needed its large freedom to display the huge bulk of his greatest comic character.

The Elizabethan drama had inherited from the medieval drama the habit of commingling with lofty characters a group of rude fellows of the baser sort, whose share in the action often seems to us now frankly incongruous. The sheep-stealing of Mak, for example, is injected into the mystery at the very moment when the shepherds are watching their flocks by night, just before the glad tidings of the birth of Him whose coming was to change the fate of the world. From the frequency with which Shakspere

went back to the chronicle-play with its careless succession of episodes heroic and humorous, we may assume that he felt assured that his audiences would unfailingly relish its swift alternations of fun and of fighting, and also that they were of true Teutonic descent, never demanding the close unity of construction which the inheritors of the Latin tradition are trained to expect. Even in the twentieth century the playwrights of our language who make the broadest popular appeal are careful to compound their melodramas in accord with a formula not unlike mixing laughter with tears and making their plays medleys of tense situations and of comic episodes which are often more or less extraneous to the main theme.

The exciting cause of 'Henry V' and of the two parts of 'Henry IV' (of which the future Henry V is really the hero) seems to have been one of the most slovenly of contemporary chronicle-plays, the 'Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth.' Apparently it was this thin and empty piece which attracted Shakspere's attention to the fascinating personality of the roistering young prince who was to expand into the noble victor of Agincourt. In that epoch of patriotic enthusiasm no one of the national heroes was closer to the hearts of the English people than the gay Prince Hal, who was successful in war and in wooing. He was the kind of king that the English liked —brave, gay and unassuming; and they liked him none the less for the wildness of his youth. The sure instinct of mankind has always recognized the larger possibilities of good in the Prodigal Son, preferring him to his staid and sober elder brother, to whom there seems to cling a taint of the Pharisee.

For a fuller knowledge of Henry V Shakspere goes to Holinshed, as he had already done when he was at work

on 'King John' and 'Richard II,' and as he was to do later when he undertook to deal with 'Macbeth.' Most of his material in all three of the plays in which Henry V figures Shakspere derived from the old historian; and the 'Famous Victories' did little more than furnish sparse hints for unimportant comic characters and for minor humorous incidents. These hints, slight and insignificant in themselves, were sufficient to set Shakspere's imagination at work. As a result, the three plays, based as they are more or less indirectly on the feeble piece he took over, and more or less directly on the record of Holinshed, are in fact as original as anything he wrote. And they contain his mightiest achievement in the creation of comic character, a creation which is entirely his own, since there is only the faintest suggestion of the towering Falstaff in the 'Famous Victories.'

II

If we may set aside 'Richard III' as a chronicle-play which is almost a tragedy, then we must admit that the first part of 'Henry IV' is the most interesting of all the other histories and the most dramatic in its separate episodes, fragmentary as the play may be in its framework. It is a brisk and bustling succession of scenes, with vivacity of movement, with humorous realism in the accessory figures, and with all possible spectacular accompaniment. Even though the name of Henry IV is bestowed on both parts, it is the future Henry V who is the central personality, lending to the plays such doubtful unity as they may have. Indeed, it might be suggested that Shakspere has really devoted a trilogy to the development of the wild prince into a wise king; and

'Henry V' may be considered as a third part of 'Henry IV.' That this triple portrayal of the career of Henry V was in Shakspere's mind is made probable by the epilogue to the second part promising to follow it with another piece dealing with Henry V.

This trilogy sets before us the three epochs of Henry's transformation from a reckless roisterer into a kingly general who can win a battle and court a fair maid in royal fashion. In the earliest play he is companioned by Falstaff, to bring out the lower side of his nature and his juvenile protest against restraint, and at the same time he is contrasted with Hotspur to evoke his nobler possibilities. Falstaff is the fit associate of his youthful irresponsibility and Hotspur is the proper rival to evoke his latent power of leadership. In this first part, the prince is almost a rogue and a vagabond, even if he tells us that he is but biding his time. In the second part, he tries on the crown before his father's death; and then swiftly succeeds to the throne. In the third part (that is, in 'Henry V'), he has broken absolutely with his disreputable past; he stands forth a true man and a good king, a congenial monarch for the English folk—a monarch who marries at last and settles down to govern for the good of his people.

The first part presents a definite action in that it deals with the cause of the rebellion of Hotspur and his allies, with the course of this rebellion, and with the collapse of it, after the fiery young rebel has been slain in single battle by Prince Hal. The play begins with a striking exposition, which sets before us, in dialogue and in action, the insubordination of the dissatisfied faction. This opening scene calls attention to the opposing figures of Prince Henry and of Hotspur; and it arouses the interest of

expectancy by declaring the collision of personal and political ambitions which is to be the motive of the play. Then the young Prince and the old Falstaff come before us in person; they are instantly welcome, and what they say whets our curiosity to see them again that we may observe their walk and conversation, and more immediately that we may learn how the projected Gadshill robbery will turn out. And in the final scene of the act we behold Hotspur himself chafing against the King, and we are present when the rebellion is hatched.

After this lively beginning the play rolls onward to its conclusion, the defeat of the rebels and the reconciliation of the king with his son, who has revealed himself as a fit inheritor of the throne. This first part of 'Henry IV' may almost be said to have a definite plot, with the future Henry V for its hero. The historic story is interrupted only by the humorous episodes in which Falstaff figures, and even these extraneous scenes are tied to the history by the fact that Prince Hal takes part in most of them. With careful ingenuity Shakspere intertwines the strands of heroism and of humor, contrasting Prince Hal at one moment with the fiery young Hotspur and at another with the rotund and disreputable Falstaff.

III

This first part is complete in itself; it has a firmer coherence than any other of Shakspere's histories, a more definite unity of purpose. The second part was not necessary to develop the prince; and Shakspere might have gone on at once to 'Henry V.' Quite possibly this was his original intention, and the second part may have been an afterthought, in consequence of the immediate popu-

larity of the first part when it was presented on the stage. Although the second part of 'Henry IV' is more labored than the first part, it appears to have been put together hastily; it lacks even the semblance of a plot; and its action is scattered. There is no new Hotspur to bring out the best in Prince Hal; and Falstaff is seen at work all by himself and no longer in close alliance with the prince. Perhaps in consequence of the absence of a commanding motive, the opening scenes provide only a clumsy exposition. The play begins by an induction or a prologue spoken by Rumor, a device of doubtful necessity. Neither Henry IV nor the future Henry V appears in the first act. The sluggishness of the story as a whole is enlivened by few individual scenes of dramatic effectiveness. The second rebellion is abortive, and it has no dramatic culmination. Even the impressive relation of the dying king to his youthful successor is set forth rather by pregnant speeches than by actual scenes in which character stands revealed in action. In fact, Shakspere's method is here rhetorical rather than truly dramatic; and it is the poet, not the playwright, who provides the superb soliloquies in which Henry IV and Henry V commune with themselves, lyrical outbursts, in manner not unlike those of the dying tenor in old-fashioned Italian opera. Finally, the comic interludes of Falstaff are more obviously invented by the author and no longer impress us as irresistible transcripts from life itself; they seem to exist more for their own sake than for the sake of the play as a whole.

'Henry V' is quite as loose in its structure as the second part of 'Henry IV'; it has no other unity than the presence of the young king. It is a mere drum-and-trumpet history, with alarums and cannon-shots, sieges and

battles, the defiance of heralds, and the marching of armies. As a specimen of playmaking it is indefensibly artless. Furnivall frankly admitted that "a siege and a battle, with one bit of light love-making, cannot form a drama, whatever amount of historical patriotic speeches and comic relief are introduced"; and Brandes is equally plain-spoken, dismissing this piece as "an epic in dialogue, without any sort of dramatic structure, development or conflict." Possibly Shakspere was getting dissatisfied with the chronicle-play as a form which made too little demand upon him; and, in fact, 'Henry V' is the last of his histories, with the exception only of 'Henry VIII' (which is not wholly his handiwork). In 'Henry V' he does not hesitate to avail himself of the medieval device of the expositor, whose narrative served to link together the separate incidents of the long-drawn mystery-play. Chorus is sent on the stage not only to speak propitiatory prologue, but to reappear again and again for the sole purpose of bridging over the yawning gaps of the action by telling the spectators what is supposed to have taken place during the intervals.

As Prince Hal was contrasted with Hotspur in the first part of 'Henry IV,' so he is provided with a foil in 'Henry V,' but with far less effect, since the Dauphin is only a vain braggart, whose boastings are hollow even in the ears of his own countrymen. Throughout the play Shakspere is grossly unfair to the French, pandering to the prejudice of the insular rabble in a fashion quite unworthy of a great poet. Indeed, the value of Henry's victory is diminished by the needless doubts cast on the valor of the foes the English king overcame. The play burns with patriotic fervor and bristles with patriotic appeals, often perilously close to jingoism, if not to claptrap.

The king himself is provided with unending speeches of a swelling eloquence, superb specimens of declamation for its own sake, examples of bravura rhetoric which afford rich histrionic opportunities, even if they are sometimes devoid of dramatic significance. High-flown as these orations are, we need not doubt Shakspere's sincerity in penning them, even if we may suspect also his consciousness that they would appeal directly to the hearts of his hearers.

IV

Casually put together as are the three pieces in which Henry V is the central figure, they disclose a distinct expansion of Shakspere's power of treating character. We discover now that he has arrived at that period of his development as a dramatist when he can call into existence at will as many varied and veracious human beings as he may need. In his earliest plays he had reproduced the traditional profiles of his predecessors; Costard and Dull, Launce and Speed, the two Dromios, are little more than the conventional clowns of the earlier Elizabethan stage; and in these same pieces even the more serious characters are such as a clever young man might fashion gaily out of his memory of similar parts in older plays. In time Shakspere came to see that he did not need to devise fantastic kings of Navarre and to evoke mythological dukes of Athens; he had only to look about him and to set his energy to work creating characters akin to those he had actually seen in the flesh. Bottom and his mates are no longer the mere masks of the theater; they smack of reality and they sprang from the soil of England. In

'Romeo and Juliet' hero and heroine alike are alive with their own vitality; and the Nurse is a superb comic character, even if Peter is still own cousin to Launce and Speed.

In the Henry V trilogy, deficient as it is in dramatic intensity, the traditional and conventional personages disappear. Almost every one of the characters, major or minor, stands forth a genuine man or woman, begotten by imagination out of observation. The gift of inexhaustible creation, the faculty of breathing the breath of life into his creatures and of sending them into the world to walk on their own feet, to speak with their own voices, and to act in accord with their own wills—this marvelous power which makes Shakspere supreme among all dramatic poets,—is made manifest in these three chronicle-plays, inhabited as they are by a host of characters who are truly characters, no longer merely parts compounded primarily to please the actors.

Henry himself, first of all a true man every inch of him, and every inch a king, brave, unassuming, full of humor, and of good humor also, pious on occasion and prayerful, equally ready to fight the French king or to court the French princess; the old king, the enfeebled and weary Bolingbroke, uneasily doubtful of the son who is so unlike him; Hotspur the fiery, and his wife, a fit spouse for so unquenchable a spirit; Owen Glendower, confident of his power to call spirits from the vasty deep; the Chief Justice, a vigorous and sympathetic personality; the sharply contrasted nobles, adherents of the king, conspirators and traitors, all limned with a firm precision of outline, even though they are but subordinate figures, needful only to fill in the background of the successive episodes—what a gallery this is of richly colored por-

traits brushed in by a master hand which has learned the value of economy of stroke!

By the side of these more or less heroic personages we have a teeming crowd of humorous characters, fresh and natural, no longer traditional and conventional. First of all, the roistering crew that fellowships with Falstaff—Poins, the prince's ally, and Bardolph of the flaming nose; then Pistol, the truculent Elizabethan, and the unforgetable pair of up-country worthies, Shallow and Silence; Mrs. Quickly, own sister to the Nurse in 'Romeo and Juliet' (and obviously designed for the same performer), with her satellite Doll Tearsheet, a piece of realism unsurpassed by the later French naturalists; and finally, Doll's appropriate mate, Nym, and the delightful Boy, who is truly a boy, with a boy's keen vision into the foibles and the falsities of those he serves. Dekker and Jonson, sworn realists as they were, have not more significantly suggested the low life of London with a more Hogarth-like fidelity to the fact. Not often was Shakspere willing to descend to these depths of humorous realism; he preferred to dwell on a loftier heroic plane; but here he discloses his ability to seize these lowly and sordid creatures and to etch their sorry characteristics with an artistic appreciation and an artistic sobriety that Dickens was not to attain.

In the third play, 'Henry V,' in which we see the king going forth to war as the leader of the English, he is accompanied by representatives of all the varied stocks of the British Isles—Fluellen, the choleric Welshman; Macmorris, the impulsive Irishman; Jamy, the cautious Scot; and the sturdy Williams, a right Englishman, holding his own with manly simplicity even in the presence of the sovran. Williams, for all the brevity of his portrayal,

is as Shaksperian a character as any, and he exemplifies an aspect of Shakspere's comprehension not evident in any other play—his understanding of the plain people, devoid of all affectation and doing their duty as they see it in manful fashion, but without any pretense and with due insistence on their right to have their own opinions even as to the deeds of their lawful rulers.

Of all this host of characters, high and low, only one has worn out his welcome to-day. The rest of them are as spontaneous and as acceptable as they were three centuries ago; but Pistol no longer appeals to our risibilities, in spite of the fact that he probably evoked more laughter when he was first seen than any of his fellows. Pistol is the Elizabethan variant of the stage-braggart, the boastful coward of Greek comedy who had come to life again in the Italian comedy-of-masks and a little later in English comedy. Shakspere has freshened him up by putting in his mouth abundant parody of contemporary bombast. When Pistol made his first appearance he was particularly up to date; but unfortunately what is up to date soon becomes out of date. A jest's prosperity lies in the ear of him that hears it; and our ears have long lost their relish for this kind of Tudor humor. Pistol was contemporary, and therefore he has proved to be temporary only, as nearly always happens. He was founded rather in fashion than in nature, and his fantastic fooling is now wearisome.

V

Falstaff, however, is eternal; he is for all time, his own, first of all, and ours also, and for our children's children after us. He is the greatest as well as the hugest of Shakspere's comic characters, unmatched in the works of any other dramatist. He is the living proof of Lowell's assertion that Shakspere is immeasurably superior to his contemporaries "in his power of pervading a character with humor, creating it out of humor, so to speak, and yet never overstepping the limits of nature and coarsening into caricature." Nothing that Shakspere had done before, not even Bottom or the Nurse, foretold the unctuous richness of Falstaff's fun, founded on sheer animal spirits, and therefore supported by an inexhaustible gaiety, unquenchable even in adverse circumstances. As Bagehot remarked, "if most men were to save up all the gaiety of their whole lives, it would come about to the gaiety of one speech in Falstaff"; and the fat knight himself never thought of saving up any of his gaiety. He pours it forth in riotous profusion; he is a reckless spendthrift of humor; and he is not only witty himself, but the cause of wit in others, as he says himself. His presence is the signal for laughter and he is enveloped by an atmosphere of joviality. He is the living embodiment of good cheer and of hearty cheerfulness. He is dampened by few misgivings as to the present or the future. He lives in this world now and he makes the best of it, never failing to find fun in it and treating life as a joke. He is sagacious, it is true; and it has been well said that he has rotundity of mind as well as rotundity of body. He is a world in himself, rolling through space, accompanied by his satellites, who are drawn to him by irresistible

attraction. Well might Emerson say that Shakspere's "fun is as wise as his earnest; its foundations are below frost."

It is a fact, of course, that Falstaff's wit is often only verbal; but this might be said of almost every other wit. A wit is constrained to be witty; he cannot help manifesting his essential quality. He is ever on the alert to shoot out the sharp and unexpected saying; and he wings his shaft with a merely verbal felicity whenever the more intellectually humorous idea does not immediately present itself. A pun has been called the lowest form of wit, perhaps because it is so often the foundation-stone; and he who is keen to thrust and parry in speech guards and lunges with whatever weapon he may hold in his hand. But the humor of Falstaff is also intellectual; and beyond all question it is incessant and incomparable. He is indefatigably nimble-witted, turning in a second in spite of his bulk, for his brain is active in proportion to the sluggishness of his body. He takes color from his companions, responding to their unexpressed desires. No doubt, he is conscious of his own gifts; he delights intensely, with a keen personal pleasure, in the laughter he arouses and anticipates. He joys in his own fantastic inventions, exaggerating his own exaggerations for the sheer fun of it, never seeking to be merely plausible and scarcely aspiring to be believed. His is truly "a splendacious mendacity." He is an artist in lying, and he glories in his command of every resource of the craft.

He never lapses from the good nature which becomes his huge girth; but he is devoid of even the most rudimentary morality. He is not only a braggart and a liar, he is also a swindler and a thief; and evēn his valōr is not beyond dispute. He is absolutely unhampered by any sort of scruple. And yet we like him; we long to

have him reappear again and again; we welcome him as a constant friend. But this liking of ours is never sentimental, maudlin, or immoral. We are willing enough that Falstaff should be found out and that he should get his deserts all in good time. Even if we feel sorry for him, we would not lift a hand to stay the proper punishment. We like him because he is so human; that is the key to his character, his humanity, his gross humanity. Nowhere else has Shakspere more completely disclosed his disinterestedness as an artist than in the detachment with which he treats his masterpiece of humorous creation. Not merely does he tolerate Falstaff, he feels also a comprehensive artistic sympathy for him as a fellow human being. But Shakspere never lets this artistic sympathy warp his vision or tempt him to confuse the eternal standards of right and wrong; he knows, even better than George Eliot, that "consequences are unpitying." In the first part of 'Henry IV' Shakspere shows that there is no meanness in Falstaff, and that his mendacity is not malicious; and he amuses us with the display of Falstaff's eel-like ingenuity in wriggling out of every tight place. But in the second part Shakspere lets us see the evil effects of Falstaff's ethical laxity; indeed, he makes evident the steady deterioration of the easy-going humorist. The trick played on Mrs. Quickly is frankly contemptible, and the despoiling of Justice Shallow is hardly less indefensible. Falstaff has sunk almost to the level of a "confidence operator." Yet even in this comparative degradation he had that which attracted all who knew him. There are sad hearts when Mrs. Quickly tells at last how he died with his nose as sharp as a pen; and Bardolph would be glad to be with him then, wherever he was, in heaven or in hell. To the end of his life he was very human.

VI

It is curious that Shakspere's boldest and broadest comic character should present himself most amply in the rambling episodes of a chronicle-play in two parts; but it is not surprising that the author should have been willing to put Falstaff into a comedy wherein he might focus the interest on himself. A doubtful tradition declares that Elizabeth bade Shakspere "show the fat knight in love," and that he complied with the royal command as promptly as Molière later was to obey the behests of Louis XIV. The text of the 'Merry Wives of Windsor' is in a lamentable state, both the quarto and the folio being corrupt and incomplete. And the evidence of improvisation is plain; the play, for example, does not show the fulfilment of Dr. Caius's promise to get even with mine Host of the Garter. We do not even know whether or not the 'Merry Wives of Windsor' was written before or after 'Henry V,' in which we are told about the death of Falstaff. In the earlier 'Henry VI' he had been spoken of as still alive and a coward.

There is inexplicable confusion in the life-stories of the characters, if we seek to apply the standard to which Balzac and Thackeray have accustomed us when they carry over their creatures from one fiction to another. Fenimore Cooper, it may be noted, did not compose the five 'Leatherstocking Tales' in the order in which they are to be read—that is, in strict historic sequence. In the first part of 'Henry IV' Mrs. Quickly has a husband, although this spouse is not made visible; in the second part she is a widow, and Falstaff wheedles her by a promise of marriage; in 'Henry V' she is married to Pistol; and in the 'Merry Wives' she and Pistol seem to have

had no previous acquaintance. In 'Henry V' Bardolph is hanged for stealing, and yet he reappears in the 'Merry Wives' without explanation. What is still stranger to our modern point of view is to find that Mrs. Quickly, whom we have known only as the keeper of a disreputable tavern, now presents herself as the staid servant of the eminently respectable Dr. Caius, and even as the confidant of that "pretty virginity," sweet Anne Page. But this is puzzling only because we have put ourselves at a point of view which would have seemed as absurd to Shakspere as to Molière after him. Neither the French dramatist nor the English recognized the obligation that Balzac and Thackeray felt, to provide consistent biographies for characters who return to the stage. The same actor played Mrs. Quickly in all four plays, just as Molière himself appeared as Sganarelle in six different pieces, just as the Italian comedians sustained each of them always the same single character no matter what the plot of the play might be, regardless of the relation this character had borne to the other characters in any earlier play. Mrs. Quickly, Bardolph and Pistol were parts which had pleased the playgoers who would be glad to welcome them again, asking no questions as to their adventures in the meantime, but accepting them at once for what they were when they reappeared.

Nor did these delighted spectators consider the date of the 'Merry Wives'; they were satisfied to behold its bustling swiftness without inquiring whether it was supposed to take place under Henry IV or Henry V, or even under Elizabeth. If we insist upon it, we can remind ourselves that Falstaff died a few weeks before the battle of Agincourt; and Shakspere even goes out of his way to tell us that Fenton had been a "follower of the mad

prince," who was to be the hero of Agincourt. But this is only the outward fact; it is not the inner truth—which is that the merry wives did not play their pranks until after the repulse of the Armada. In this comedy, at least, Falstaff and Mrs. Quickly, Bardolph and Pistol and Nym are not contemporaries of Henry IV or of Henry V; they are subjects of the valiant daughter of Henry VIII. Beyond all question the background of the 'Merry Wives' is Elizabethan; and indeed this is the only comedy in which Shakspere dealt with contemporary life, with the English manners and with the English customs of his own time. There is the accent of those spacious days when the English people were prosperous and proud, stout-hearted and gay. There is the note of reality throughout the play, of things known intimately. Shakspere gives us here not a sketch of the low life of the city, but a picture of the middle class in a country town. For reasons of his own, obvious enough, Shakspere chooses to call this town Windsor, but it might have been Stratford, for the thoroughness of his understanding of the ways of the inhabitants.

Redolent of the country-side as the atmosphere of the comedy may be, there is something foreign in the motive of the main story. While the place is unmistakably England, and while the characters have the full flavor of its soil, while their nationality is never dubious, the action in which they are involved is un-English and Italianate. The double intrigue of Falstaff with Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Page was, of course, possible in England as anywhere else, but it was not characteristically English; and the violent jealousy of Ford is equally uncharacteristic. Several of the arbitrary devices which serve to make up the plot are taken over bodily from one or another of the

fertile Italian story-tellers who continued the tradition of Boccaccio, artful in narrating the stratagems and treasons of amorous misadventure. It is from a common source in one of these collections of ingenious intrigues that Shakspere and Molière borrowed the same situation, —Falstaff innocently babbling to Ford about Mrs. Ford as Horace unwittingly betrays himself and Agnès to Arnolphe. There is in this play of Shakspere's a use of sheer practical joking, and of tricks recoiling on the head wherein they are hatched, which recalls the 'Étourdi,' perhaps the most Italian of all Molière's more farcical pieces. The English comedy also terminates in a semi-spectacular dance, much in the same fashion as the French 'Bourgeois Gentilhomme' and 'Malade Imaginaire.'

It is by this final dance of the fairies that two of three ingeniously complicated intrigues are wound up. The triplicate action includes the joke on the Host, on Evans and Caius; and this is over and done with long before the final act, even if we lack the promised but possibly never-written scene in which Caius has his revenge. The two other actions present the three wooers of sweet Anne Page and the amatory advances of Falstaff to the merry wives, with the inordinate jealousy of Ford and the consequent discomfiture of the predatory knight. The exposition is excellent, all in action, bringing on the necessary characters; and by the end of the first act we are in the thick of the plot—of all the plots, Falstaff's pursuit of Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Page, and the threefold courtship of Mrs. Page's daughter by Slender and Caius and Fenton.

If we may define comedy as consisting of an action caused by the conflict of character with character, the characters conditioning the action, and farce as an action

which conditions the characters and forces them to fit as best they can into the prescribed situations—then the 'Merry Wives' must be taken as farce rather than comedy, since the plot conditions all the characters, especially Falstaff, and forces them into situations they would not seek of their own free will. But although the action is artificial and arbitrary, the piece is lifted above the ordinary level of farce by the amplitude of the characters. They may be constrained by the playwright, now and again, to do things foreign to their natural instincts, but they are all of them humorously real and realistically humorous.

The framework of a frank farce is here filled out by creatures actually alive. And the action itself is ingeniously invented and adroitly contrived; it moves swiftly, with a satisfactory sequence of amusing situations. Perhaps because it is a farce-comedy of contemporary manners, lacking in romantic remoteness, it is the least poetic of all Shakspere's comedies; if not the most prosaic, it has the fewest lines of actual verse. And at this period of Shakspere's development as a poet he had already an almost unerring instinct in the appropriate employment of prose or verse.

The mechanism of the plot works smoothly, but only at the cost of Falstaff. To fit him into the prescribed intrigue he has to be sadly shorn of his strength. It was a sorry day for Sir John when he left Gadshill for Windsor. To make the action what its author had foreordained Falstaff has to be deprived of his indefatigable resourcefulness and to be hoodwinked at the very moment when he is striving to hoodwink others. At times Falstaff is made to appear almost wilful in self-deception, poking his head wantonly into traps that a dull man could

scarcely have failed to suspect. He is compelled by the author to send identical letters by the same messenger to two women whom he knows to be boon companions. He blunders guilelessly into pitfall after pitfall; and Sir John is not a man without guile. The snare is set almost in sight of the bird, and a wily old cock like Falstaff would never have placed foot in it even once, and yet he is netted twice and thrice. He lets himself be deceived not merely by ordinary human beings, but also by fairies of a palpable humanity. It is no wonder that at the end he puts to himself the pertinent question, "Have I laid my brain in the sun and dried it, so that it wants matter to prevent as gross o'erreaching as this?"

The man who is scorned and turned into ridicule by Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Page, and who is tricked by Ford himself, is no longer the man whom we have seen coaxing the irate and injured Mrs. Quickly to sell her precious possessions for his benefit. He may retain his humor of speech with its contagious gaiety, but his wits are not what they had been, for he is now a butt and only a butt, the very Falstaff who had been infinitely masterful in contriving stratagems against others. Much of the heartiness of his fun is taken from him when he whose prime function it is to fool others is himself unceasingly befooled. In the chronicle-plays we laugh with him at least as often as we laugh at him; but in the comedy-farce we can only laugh at him. Nor is this the worst, for we are forced to sit idly by while manifold indignities are heaped upon his huge bulk. Beatings and buck-baskets full of foul linen are not fit punishments for the fat knight, whom we cannot help liking despite all his foibles. We hold him in affection in spite of his evil life, and we feel that he is superior to gross defilements

like these. Even if he has deserved them, they seem to us out of keeping with his generous humor; and we are ready to declare that for once Shakspere has been unfair to one of his creatures—very much as Cervantes degraded the lean knight who is his sad hero by the pranks of which Don Quixote is the victim in the second part of the novel.

It has been suggested by Professor Gummere that in the physical misadventures of the two knights, as in the later indignities put upon Parson Adams, we can perceive a survival of the earlier communal humor, when the laughter of the tribe was most easily aroused by actual suffering, and when even torture was accepted as mirth-provoking. The Elizabethan playgoer had nerves which were not enfeebled by sympathy for man or beast. And here again, in the joyous 'Merry Wives,' as earlier in the gruesome 'Titus Andronicus,' we catch a glimpse of the gulf which yawns between the Elizabethans and ourselves. Here once more we are compelled to confess that Shakspere, modern as he may be in so many manifestations, is often semi-medieval in his attitude. We shall discover another instance of this when we come to consider his conception of Shylock.

VII

The play in which Shylock appears was probably produced earlier even than 'Romeo and Juliet' and before all the Falstaff pieces; but its consideration here may be postponed so that it can be grouped with the other romantic-comedies compounded in accord with the same formula. Before dealing with this group of romantic-comedies there is yet another of Shakspere's farces to be

dealt with, the 'Taming of the Shrew,' which seems to have been written before 'As you Like it.' Farce brings out the humor of situation rather than the humor of character, and it appeals to the emotions of surprise rather than to the emotions of recognition. It is therefore held to be inferior to true comedy, but it is in itself a legitimate kind of play, filling a niche of its own, provoking laughter for its own sake.

Doubts have been cast upon Shakspere's authorship of this farce, owing largely to the fact that its workmanship seems altogether unworthy of him at this period of his development as a dramatist. If it is wholly his, we can see in it another instance of his willingness to economize invention, since we know that it is a reworking of an earlier piece, called the 'Taming of a Shrew.' To the main plot, taken over bodily from the older play, Shakspere adds an ingeniously complicated underplot borrowed from Gascoigne's version of a comic drama by Ariosto. The author of the 'Taming of a Shrew' had already drawn upon Gascoigne's adaptation; and Shakspere, as was his wont, goes back to the remoter source of his immediate source, just as he had done in the Henry V histories when he returned to Holinshed, from whose chronicles the writer of the 'Famous Victories' had already drawn.

Not only has Shakspere derived the adroit complexity of his subordinate story from the Italian; he has also borrowed types from the comedy-of-masks, one minor character being designated only as a Pedant, quite in accord with the Bolognese tradition, and Grumio being once spoken of as a Pantaloon (which is the English for the Venetian Pantaleone). On the other hand, Grumio and Tranio and Biondello are simply the clowns of the earlier

English drama, the equivalents of Costard and Dull, Launce and Speed. Most of the other characters are also merely outlined without any psychologic subtlety. Kate is a fiery termagant who is a true woman at heart, overcome at last not so much by the mere physical violence of Petruchio as by the masterfulness of her arbitrary mate, sweeping all before him by sheer force of will, by the brute force of a domineering masculinity. Shakspere has here handled the medieval theme of wife-taming by boisterous vigor, with no attempt to disguise its crude cruelty. His attitude is frankly archaic, and he makes little effort to bestow plausibility on the plot he has chosen to treat. He takes this story as he finds it; he reinforces its construction; he complicates it with fresh incidents; and he rattles through it with irresistible velocity.

Petruchio's motives are sordid in agreeing to wed Katherine, and Katherine's temper is inexcusable. Nowhere does Shakspere suggest any genuine affection of the bridegroom for the bride; nor does he adequately account for the regard which the wife at last displays toward her husband. The treatment of motive and of character is sketchy and superficial, although we can perceive that Shakspere wrote with obvious gusto the scenes between the irreconcilable hero and heroine. The conflict of these two personalities is the core of the play; it may be monotonous, and perhaps this is why Shakspere artfully relieved it with the more varied episodes which present the several wooers of Katherine's younger sister, thus diluting the strong scenes of the main story, scenes which still make the play effective on the stage, even if it reveals its thinness in the study.

Andrew Lang, considering the play from the purely lit-

erary point of view, declared that "the central idea is an incredible old popular joke," and decided that "in wit, poetry and desirable characters, the comedy is sadly to seek." And in the library no other opinion is possible. Except the 'Comedy of Errors' the 'Taming of the Shrew' is the most completely farcical of all Shakspere's plays, external in its action, flimsy in its character-drawing, deficient in reality, theatrical rather than dramatic. It has none of the rich mellow humor of Falstaff and none of the brilliant and blithesome wit of Portia and Rosalind. These defects are undeniable where the play is only read; but they do not spoil its theatrical effectiveness when it is acted. As soon as Katherine and Petruchio appear before us in the flesh, we are instantly caught up by their whirlwind wooing; we want to follow the course of their matrimonial combat; we await the successive stages of the comic strife with appreciative expectancy. We may not be convinced, but we are provoked to laughter. And a purely theatrical criticism must confess that the plot is well handled, lacking as it may be in refinement and in depth. The exposition is swift, clear and enticing; we are made acquainted with the desire of the several suitors to marry Bianca and with her father's insistence that the younger daughter shall not wed before the elder; and when Kate bursts in upon us, a splendid animal in a splendid rage, we wonder what manner of man will be venturesome enough to undertake her conquest. And from this lively exposition the play moves forward with unflagging vivacity to its necessary conclusion.

One of the evidences of the immaturity of the Elizabethan drama was the use of the kindred devices of the play-within-the-play (as in 'Hamlet'), and of the induction, a slight external framework inclosing the main play.

These devices are not unlike the unrelated stories injected into longer novels (as in 'Don Quixote' and 'Tom Jones'), the authors not yet knowing quite how to get the utmost out of their material without these external aids. This trick is carried to its ultimate extreme in the 'Arabian Nights,' where we have story within story within story, "laborious orient ivory sphere in sphere." There was an induction in the earlier 'Taming of a Shrew,' which showed how a drunkard fell asleep, how he was befooled by being told he was a man of high degree, and how he was then amused by a play in which a shrew was tamed, whereupon he goes home to apply this method to his own wife. Shakspere uses the beginning of this to open his own play, but he casts away the end, leaving us no clue to the conduct of Sly after he is disabused. When the Katherine-and-Petruchio story is about to be shown the stage-direction reads "enter the drunkard above," that is, in the gallery over the back of the stage, where he could look down on the play supposed to be presented for his amusement. It has been ingeniously suggested that Shakspere discarded the later scenes of the induction, and withdrew Sly from the gallery above so that it might be free, when the time came, for the Pedant to look out of the window.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ROMANTIC-COMEDIES

I

In most of the plays, grave and gay, which Shakspere had written prior to the 'Merchant of Venice' we can perceive evidence that he had not yet found the existing dramatic formulas entirely adequate for his full artistic self-expression. But we can see also that the period of experiment is drawing to an end and that he has completed his apprenticeship. He has mastered the mystery of exposition; he has learned the value of contrast; he has taught himself how to build up an action, intensifying its interest, scene by scene, as it rises to its culmination; and he has discovered that he need not invent characters by the aid of fantasy, since the world about him proffered countless men and women for his imagination to transfigure. He has built the artfully articulated plot of his first great tragedy, 'Romeo and Juliet,' and he has created his greatest comic character, Falstaff. The composition of a dozen plays of varying types has shown him how he could best do what he wanted to do. He has entered already on the period of assured mastery and of exalted ambition, the period to which belong his supreme masterpieces—in tragedy, 'Hamlet,' 'Othello' and 'Macbeth'; in comedy, the 'Merchant of Venice,' 'Much Ado,' 'As you Like it' and 'Twelfth Night'.

The earliest of these comedies, the 'Merchant of Venice,' had been written before Falstaff had come into

being; and the latest, 'Twelfth Night,' was produced only a little earlier than 'Hamlet.' All four of them were apparently composed in the final half-decade of the sixteenth century. In their structure they are curiously alike; they abound in pairs of heroines sharply contrasted, in love at first sight, in mistakes of identity, and in disguisings which deceive the characters and which delight the spectators. They have each of them for the center of interest a tale of true love that ran smoothly for the most part, although not without obstacles and obstructions. And this central story of young lovers meeting and mating in the springtime of their happy lives is supported by a vigorous underplot which seems at times almost about to stiffen into tragedy. The highest type of pure comedy, as we discover it in Molière, can be defined as a humorous play, the action of which is the inevitable result of the clash of character on character, the story being what it is solely because the characters are what they are. This definition does not fit these four charming comedies of Shakspere, since his stories are not strictly caused by his chief characters, who are at times almost passive under the pressure of the arbitrary subplot which supplies the necessary dramatic strength. These subplots are in themselves romanticist, even if Shakspere has seen fit to ennoble them with real characters; they are often archaic in the unreality of their motives; and they are tolerable to-day only because we are willing to make believe.

In fact, these four comedies are frankly medieval in their devices, and they are renascence only in the characters who are subject to these devices. The persons still seem to us modern enough because they are most of them eternally true to life, whereas the stories themselves are

remote, outworn, and even in some measure absurd. Shakspere asks us to accept tales which are no longer acceptable, and he wins our consent because of the beautiful veracity of his chief characters. It is as if he were requesting us to permit the artificiality of the tale itself on his promise to carry on this tale by veritable human beings who shall obey the strictest logic of life. In the 'Merchant of Venice,' for example, the pound-of-flesh story and the story of the three caskets are hopelessly inconceivable in any world that ever was; but Portia is perfectly true to life as we know it, and so is Shylock. We can enjoy the delightful vision of Portia set over against the sinister profile of Shylock only if we are ready to receive as real the transcendent unreality of the incidents which bring these two characters together. We can get our full measure of enjoyment out of the merry war between Beatrice and Benedick only if we are willing for the moment to close our eyes to the arrant impossibility of the wicked scheme by which the marriage of Hero and Claudio is broken off. In the two later comedies, 'As you Like it' and 'Twelfth Night,' the semi-tragic subplot is less important—indeed, in the last of the four its place is usurped by a humorous understory.

One of the ways by which Shakspere subtly wins our attention for a tale that we might otherwise reject is to lay the scene of all four of these romantic-comedies in a realm of unreality, an undiscovered country of dreams. He may call this Venice or Messina, Illyria or the Forest of Arden; but he avails himself of these geographic expressions merely to attain the effect of remoteness, the illusion of a no-man's-land afar off, a strange place where the strangest things may happen, and where the inhabitants are not fettered by the sordid bonds of every-day ex-

istence. The Forest of Arden, in which snakes glide and lions roam, can be contiguous only to the principality of Zenda, not far from the town of Weissnichtwo. Its boundaries may not be traceable on any actual map, and yet a joyous host of recognizable human beings wander at will through its glades and explore its distant recesses. Skeptical geographers have even ventured to surmise that it may once have been incorporated in the land of *opéra-comique*—often called La Scribie, after its explorer, Scribe—a country fair to see, where lovers undergo easy trials and where all the laws are promulgated for the sole benefit of the playwright. Yet this region of romance cannot be very far from the England of Elizabeth, since most of the inhabitants have English for their native tongue and are ordered by English manners and customs. Touchstone and Adam, Dogberry and Verges, Sir Toby Belch, Sir Andrew Aguecheek and the incomparable Maria—all these live and move and have their being in their native land, the very island where Bottom was at home, though he may have supposed himself to abide at Athens, and where the Nurse was born who acted as go-between in Verona.

II

To us nowadays the central personage of the 'Merchant of Venice' is not the somber Antonio, who gives the play its title, nor the lovely Portia, but the sinister Shylock. We go to the theater to see a great actor in this great part; and Macready, followed by Lawrence Barrett, went so far as to cut the piece down to a Shylock-play in three acts, ending with the trial-scene. But this is plainly a betrayal of Shakspere's intent. In his mind the central

personage is indisputably Portia. The play opens with talk about the lady of Belmont; and it ends at Belmont, with the lady about to begin her life of wedded bliss. "Take away Belmont and the drama will not stand," M. Jusserand has pointed out. "Belmont is fairy-land; everything there is young, beautiful, radiant and charming; from there can come only happiness, joy and marvels."

For all his importance to us Shylock appears only in five scenes, and not once in the fifth act. He comes into the play only that his hard feeling toward Antonio may bring about the deadly peril in which the merchant is involved, so that the warm-hearted and quick-witted Portia may extricate her husband's benefactor and triumphantly confute the evil-minded usurer. Even immediately after the tension of the trial-scene the disguised heroine claims from her husband the ring she has given him, simply to provide material for the fifth act, a comic complication being necessary to carry on the comedy a little longer. Without this amusing business of the ring the final scenes would be void of matter. Portia lingers in our sight long after Shylock has gone out, disgraced and degraded; and she had been introduced to us before we were allowed to lay eyes on the scheming moneylender. The play is a comedy in its blithesome tone; it is a tale of true lovers, three couples of them; and the evil plot of the sordid wretch whom Portia defeats with the weapons of the law is scarcely more than a grave incident introduced to intensify our interest in the love-story. The temper of the piece is not that of tragedy; and its sentiment does not deepen into tragic passion. Its appeal is primarily to eternal youth, which loves a lover, and which likes a love-story that is almost a fairy-tale.

There is external evidence that Shakspere was probably here remaking an earlier piece in which the pound of flesh and the three caskets had already been combined; and internal evidence confirms this. Very often Shakspere is at his best when he is improving a ready-made play. This is exactly what he was to do with 'Hamlet,' the immediate source of which is also lost. He takes the earlier author's plot and makes it his own; and he also makes it over to suit himself. The 'Merchant of Venice' is like 'Hamlet' again in that it is just the kind of play we should expect from Shakspere at the period when it was produced; and both plays as we have them are probably better than they would have been if Shakspere had not been sustained and stimulated by the earlier pieces. In both of these plays, the comedy and the tragedy, the invention of the bare story may be due to an earlier playwright; but the construction must be mainly Shakspere's, since it is excellent and beyond the power of any of his predecessors.

In the 'Merchant of Venice' the two plots are intertwined with felicitous dexterity, the Shylock episodes being dealt with in precisely the proper proportion to relieve and lift up the Portia episodes. The exposition is admirable; we see, first of all, the disenchanted and large-minded Antonio, glad to help along the wooing of the ardent Bassanio, but already possessed by a presentiment of impending calamity; then we are carried to Belmont to get acquainted with the woman Bassanio wishes to woo; and only after attention has been called to these young lovers, and only after we have been allowed to foresee their ultimate union, does the repellent Shylock come into view to propose his merry bond with its fatal forfeit. Thereafter we are witnesses of the preparations for Jessica's elopement, whereby she is to despoil her father; it is

this theft of his daughter and of his ducats which is to intensify Shylock's vindictive bitterness against all Christians and so to sharpen his purpose when the bond is not met on the appointed day. And in alternate scenes with these we behold the choosing of the caskets by the three suitors in turn, Bassanio at last making the happy choice, whereupon Portia surrenders herself to him in a speech of noble tenderness, heartfelt and feminine. Then we discover that Gratiano and Nerissa have also come to a swift understanding. Suddenly, without warning, while the four lovers are in the first flush of happiness, there comes the news of Antonio's inability to meet the bond. The trial-scene is thus prepared for—to be handled when it comes at last with a superb crescendo of dramatic effect. And in the final passages of the play Shylock is forgotten and the three couples are light-hearted lovers again, billing and cooing in the molten moonlight.

The center of interest is ever the superb Portia, to be compared only with Rosalind, also a creature of joy, radiant and wholesome, born to be happy. Portia is the earliest of Shakspere's marvelous heroines of comedy, the older sister of Beatrice and Rosalind and Viola. They are sisters truly, with a strong family likeness, yet not twins, any pair of them, for they are as unlike as sisters often are. Portia is frolic-loving yet lofty of soul; she is mischievous yet dignified; a true woman, with abundant fervor and with no lack of humor. What has Bassanio done to deserve a wife so wonderful? He has wooed her, for one thing, and she has opportunity to find out in him merits disclosed only to her. Fit companion for the joyous Portia is the joyous Nerissa; and joyous also is Jessica, for whose unfilial robbery of her father Shakspere has never a word of blame. Like Portia and

like Nerissa, Jessica was lovely and she was beloved; and in a comedy of many wooings her wanton thefts from her outlawed father do not demand our condemnation. After all, who is this father whom Jessica despoiled? Only Shylock, whom we have had good reason to hate and whom we have seen scorned and humbled in the dust. We may have feared the evil creature, but only for a little space; the play is a comedy, after all; and even if we have dreaded Shylock we have laughed at him in the end, even as we despised him.

To the Elizabethans, strange as this may seem to us, madness was often comic, and so was rage, which is a less intense madness. Early in the medieval drama Herod, with his effervescent violence, had become a humorous character, at whom the audience was expected to roar. Shakspere means his spectators to hate Shylock and also to laugh at him. The dramatist adroitly commingles the pathetic appeal which Shylock makes to us moderns with seemingly incongruous comic effects. Just after Shylock speaks of the turquoise ring which he had of Leah when he was a bachelor he is made to declare that he would not have parted with it for "a wilderness of monkeys." Shylock is the villain of the play, no doubt, but he is a villain both sternly tragic and grimly comic, exposed to constant derision and jeered at unfeelingly by Gratiano at the very moment of his abject defeat. Shakspere is incessant in forcing us to see all the evil in Shylock; his very servant is made to speak against him, and his only daughter is glad to escape from his hated house. Before he comes into view to lament his ducats and his daughter Salanio has already informed the audience that the old man has made himself a laughing-stock to the rabble. And when Shylock himself appears, wrought up to a

pitch of frenzy, he moved the contemporary playgoers to ribald mirth, without in any way detracting from their detestation of the wicked usurer who has met only his just deserts.

That this was Shakspere's intent will seem indisputable to all who remember Marlowe's 'Jew of Malta,' and who can put themselves back into the Elizabethan attitude toward Jews and toward usury, a most abhorrent trade, denounced by law and condemned by public opinion. But, like many another great artist, Shakspere builded better than he knew, and we can find in his portrayal of Shylock much that he may not have meant to put there. To the men of the sixteenth century Shylock may have been only a comic villain; to us in the twentieth century he is a supremely pathetic figure, with whom we have even a certain sympathy. We cannot help feeling that scant justice has been measured out to him. Unfair as Shakspere often is in his artful preparation to force us to detest Shylock and to despise him, at other times the great poet is fair enough in making us see the Jew's grievances and provocations. Antonio has treated Shylock shamefully; we perceive this now, although Shakspere's contemporaries probably approved of the merchant's inexcusable brutality. And in the speech in which Shylock asks, "Hath not a Jew eyes?" Shakspere allows the old man to speak for himself for once, to speak out of the fullness of his own heart, to speak for his whole race.

As it was against the law of England, from Edward I to Cromwell, for any Jew to reside in England, it is dimly possible that Shakspere himself had never laid eyes on an actual Hebrew; and yet this is most unlikely, since we know that the law was not strictly enforced. At all events, it is not probable that Shakspere could have had

any intimate knowledge of Hebrew characteristics; and this makes his subtle understanding of Shylock all the more marvelous. Brandes, himself a Hebrew, has drawn attention to the "instinct of genius with which Shakspere has seized upon and emphasized what is peculiarly Jewish in Shylock's culture," drawing his language from the Old Testament, and having in commerce "his only point of contact with the civilization of later times." Brandes also notes as racial Shylock's insistence upon the letter of the law, and the way in which his ardent passion employs "images and parables in the service of a curiously sober rationalism." As a result of this insight, and by sheer force of his instinctive genius, Shakspere, apparently meaning to set before us a villain akin to Marlowe's Barabbas, has left us a genuine human being, not a threatening silhouette of black evil, but a rounded character which we can approach from various angles. Because of this inherent (if unintended) humanity, Shylock has now usurped the central place in the play. The piece that Shakspere meant for a comedy has changed color before our eyes until it looms up as almost tragic in the overthrow of a powerful personality. The comic aspects of Shylock have disappeared from our modern vision, and the pathetic interest of the desolate figure is now most obvious. The transformation of the feelings of the audience has compelled a transformation of the method of the actors who may now be intrusted with the part; and we find Sir Henry Irving, for example, writing to Miss Ellen Terry: "Shylock was a ferocity—there's no doubt about it; but I cannot play the part on those lines." In this transformation of Shylock we have another illustration of the old saying that talent does what it can, while genius does what it must.

III

In 'Much Ado about Nothing,' as in the 'Merchant of Venice,' the story itself lacks credibility from our modern standpoint. We may even be moved to call it absurd in its arbitrary artificiality, although we can recognize that it has the startling surprises which the Elizabethan audience delighted in, even if they were not in accord with the logic of human nature. But the play which Shakspere makes out of the impossible story of 'Much Ado' is almost as well constructed as the play he compounded out of the equally impossible story of the 'Merchant of Venice.' Considered merely as stage-plays, both of these romantic-comedies are marvels of dramaturgic dexterity. The exposition of 'Much Ado' is as clear and as alluring as the exposition of the 'Merchant,' and we are invited at once to watch the mating of Beatrice and Benedick, two gay and gallant figures, probably already in love with each other unknown to themselves. We may assume this unsuspected mutual affection because Shakspere sets them to quarreling as soon as they meet before our eyes; and when any young woman is represented on the stage quarreling with a young man theatrical tradition warrants the belief that they must be in love with each other or otherwise they would not thus waste their own time and distract the attention of the spectators.

The core of 'Much Ado' is the coming together of Beatrice and Benedick; and the supporting semi-tragic framework is supplied by the scheme of the villains to disgrace Hero at the altar just as she is about to be wedded to Claudio. This dark subplot Shakspere treats

with summary disregard of probability; it does not appear to him important: it is but an accessory to the amatory relations of Beatrice and Benedick. The change of attitude which has taken place among us who speak English has led us to thrust forward Shylock and to see in him the central figure of the piece in which he was designed to play only a subordinate part; and in like manner the inherited Latin love of logic has led the French to insist that Hero is really the heroine of 'Much Ado,' with the result that in a translation (or rather adaptation) of 'Much Ado' acted in Paris toward the end of the nineteenth century Beatrice and Benedick were thrust into the background and deprived of their prominence by the excision of most of their wit-battles. Plainly this is contrary to Shakspere's intent; it is repugnant to the formula of the special type of romantic-comedy in which he gives us a brilliant love-story sustained by a semi-tragic complication, sufficient to heighten the dramatic intensity, but kept down rigorously to its proper service as an underplot.

As the Bassanio-Portia story combines with the Shylock-Antonio story in the trial-scene, so the Beatrice-Benedick story combines with the Hero-Claudio story in the church-scene. The combination is skilful enough, but it is less satisfactory in 'Much Ado' than in the 'Merchant,' because the author has taught us to hate Shylock and he expects us not to dislike Claudio, who is made to exhibit a callous and arrogant levity, which makes us feel that Hero is well rid of so despicable a husband, and which makes us restive when we behold later the marriage that is patched up in the final scene. "Why is it that comedies always end with a marriage?" a French wit asked, only to answer bitterly, "Because it is then that the tragedy begins." The union of the delicate Hero with

the shallow Claudio has abundant tragic possibilities—if we take it seriously. But this is just what Shakspere did not intend. Hero and Claudio are ancillary to Beatrice and Benedick. Claudio insults Hero at the altar, so that Beatrice can imperiously bid Benedick to "kill Claudio," the full dramatic climax of the episode, the point for which the scene is artfully constructed. It is for this direct appeal to Benedick's affection for Beatrice that the carefully compounded plot has been built up. At this electric contact of these two loyal and generous natures the flash reveals at once their deeper passions. This is the moment of supreme importance, and Shakspere is equal to it when it comes, even if he has brought it about by machinations not a little fantastic.

The vulnerable elements of the play are all in the Hero-Claudio episodes; and they are not easily defensible according to our modern insistence upon plausibility. We do not believe in Don John's frankly confessed villainy, which seems to us mere motiveless malignity. We do not accept Borachio's ready improvisation of a trick to injure Claudio by blackening Hero, against whom neither Borachio nor Don John has any grievance. We see no sense in the Priest's suggestion that Hero shall follow Juliet's example and pretend to be dead. And we do not understand how Claudio can make amends to the dead Hero whom he has insulted by wedding a cousin of hers. But what do all these hesitancies amount to? The trick of Borachio is the cause of Beatrice's outburst to Benedick; and his later drunkenness makes us acquainted with Dogberry and Verges, for whose sake we are willing to pardon a host of inconsistencies. With very little trouble Shakspere might have removed these improbabilities and made his story completely credible. Credi-

bility, however, was a quality not demanded by the Elizabethans whom he was seeking to please; and perhaps their preference was rather for the illogical unexpectedness which annoys us nowadays since stricter standards of probability have been established. Shakspere does not take the trouble to make his work foursquare, apparently because he did not deem it worth while, since he has put Beatrice and Benedick in the forefront of his play, and it was upon them that he expects his spectators to concentrate their interest. Everything else that might be in the play is accessory to this gay and gallant couple.

In presenting Beatrice and Benedick at full length Shakspere takes another step in advance, in that he reveals them to us growing before our eyes. In all the earlier plays the characters remain at the end very much what they had been at the beginning. But Beatrice and Benedick have been modified by their experiences, and we have seen them develop, just as we are later to see Macbeth and Othello disintegrate while we are watching them. We have in this comedy a foretaste of Shakspere's supreme gift—his power of letting his characters rise or fall by force of living, as a result of the stress they have encountered, of the forces which they have overcome or to which they have succumbed. In a comedy this transformation is necessarily more superficial than in the later tragedies, but here it is plainly visible.

As this development of character in the play itself anticipates the later tragedies, so the characters of Beatrice and Benedick were themselves anticipated in the brilliant pair of witty lovers in 'Love's Labour's Lost.' What Shakspere was able only to sketch in outline in the early comedy he is now able to paint with a profusion

of detail. Beatrice and Benedick are both of them set on their feet with effortless ease; but Shakspere has depicted Beatrice with a more affectionate touch than Benedick, who is own cousin to Mercutio, and akin also to Faulconbridge; he is a fine figure of a man, as ready with his sword as with his tongue, yet Beatrice is a more fascinating personality, affluently feminine, fundamentally loyal, passionate yet free from sentimentality. We may admit that she has a little touch of Kate the shrew, although Benedick will be able, on occasion, to play Petruchio. Her spirits are forever overflowing; she is ever merry, and she knows herself clever, even if she may think herself cleverer than she really is. At times she is a little aggressive, joying in verbal thrust and parry. Her tongue is sometimes a weapon of offense; and occasionally her repartee is point-blank, not to call it blunt. Her plainness of speech, her frankness, her boldness are Elizabethan; her abiding charm is all her own, unaffected by the changing years. "Dear Lady Disdain" is as captivating to-day as she was three centuries ago. Age cannot stale her, and the comedy in which she appears is kept fresh by her exuberant vitality.

IV

In 'As you Like it' the supporting underplot scarcely ever attains even the semi-tragic. It is only an induction, a framework for the episodes in the Forest of Arden. We have our attention called to it in the beginning of the play and again at the end, but in the middle of it Rosalind draws all eyes to her and to her lover. Shakspere finds his story not in an earlier play, but in a long-winded and pedantic pastoral romance. As usual he handles his

material with full freedom; he omits and condenses, he rearranges incidents and he adds new characters—Jaques and Touchstone and Audrey. Above all, he heightens and he brightens the tale he borrows, bestowing a generous humanity upon the traditional figures of the pastoral play, which was an elaborately artificial form. Perhaps he recalled the rustic scenes of Greene's 'Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay,' and perhaps he was influenced by two Robin Hood pieces produced by rival companies only a few months earlier than 'As you Like it.'

He does not trouble himself to complicate the story into a really dramatic plot, relying rather upon the contrast of character than upon the sharpness of a struggle between contending desires. Yet his exposition is clear and swift. Orlando is posed before us at once, strong of body and direct of will, manly and resolute. The animosity of his elder brother is shown in action; and we are made to feel the sense of impending peril, not to be taken very seriously, but none the less plainly visible. Then in the episode of the wrestling we behold the actual danger from which the young hero escapes, and we are made spectators of the love at first sight of Rosalind and Orlando. After that the banishment follows immediately, first of Orlando, and then of Rosalind; and our longing has been awakened to behold their meeting later in the Forest of Arden, where the rest of the action is to take place. This is the necessary introduction, skilfully outlined to arouse sympathetic expectancy.

It is to the succession of episodes in the Forest of Arden that 'As you Like it' owes its abiding charm, to the lovely groves and glades as well as to the lovely beings who range through them. When we follow Orlando and Rosalind into that enchanted woodland we take a vaca-

tion from the workaday world and we enter a domain of indisputable happiness, where no one grieves deeply whatever may befall, and where even the banished are reconciled to their exile and take life cheerily, letting their blithe hearts overflow in song. In this happiest of his comedies Shakspere invites us, so Andrew Lang declared, "into that ideal commonwealth for which all men in all times have sighed: the land of an easeful liberty; the life natural, which has never existed in nature, where there is neither war nor toil, but endless security and peace beneath the sky and the trees." It is a forest akin to the Sherwood of the old ballads, but inhabited by beings less boisterous. It is fragrant with the aroma of romance, an enchanted region of unattained and restful delight, the dream of lyric youth.

Here, outdoors, in the open air, under the cloudless sky, while the fresh breeze blows across the sylvan spaces and rustles the shimmering tree-tops, life fleets merrily, touched with tender sentiment, and never stirred by the depths of passion. The atmosphere may be that of Virgilian eclogue, but the attitude is rather that of Horatian revery. The tone of the comedy is that of the most delicate "familiar verse," blithe and buoyant. 'As you Like it' is in many ways the most fanciful and the most lyric of Shakspere's plays; it is the comedy of young love, as 'Romeo and Juliet' is the tragedy of young love. It is an eternal spring-poem, set in dialogue and action and singing itself to its own music. And yet, strangely enough, it has less verse than almost any other of Shakspere's plays. The exquisite colloquies of Rosalind and Orlando, instinct with poetry, are largely in prose, although the talk of Silvius and Phœbe is allowed to soar aloft into blank verse, which is often allotted also to

Jaques. Perhaps nothing displays more certainly Shakspere's intuitive mastery over every chord of the lyre than the intangible art by which the wooings of Rosalind are etherealized into poetry, while the medium of expression is but prose.

It may be that Shakspere was led to utilize Lodge's story because it required the heroine to disguise herself as a lad. This was a common dramaturgic device under Elizabeth, deriving a part of its piquancy from the performance of the female characters by boys. Shakspere had already employed it in the 'Two Gentlemen of Verona' and the 'Merchant of Venice'; and he was to make use of it again in 'Twelfth Night.' In fact, in this group of romantic-comedies Beatrice is the only heroine who is not required to don the apparel of the opposite sex. In 'As you Like it' the piquancy is redoubled, since Rosalind, played by a youth, attires herself as a lad and then has to pretend to Orlando that she is a girl—a trick of surpassing theatrical effectiveness.

Amusing as the situation is in itself, its histrionic possibilities are increased by Rosalind's demure enjoyment of it. She feels the fun of it, for she has an eager sense of humor as well as a bubbling wit. She is unfailingly witty as she is unfailingly feminine; and her tongue has no tang to it. Her wit is not coruscating or aggressive in attack; it is lambent and illuminating. Here she is unlike Beatrice, who fences for sheer delight in the passage of arms itself, and who cares little if the button chances to drop from her foil. Petulant as Rosalind may be on occasion, and provoking, she is ever womanly, with a depth of sentiment not inferior to Viola's. She is at once sprightly and tender, frank and cheerful, the English ideal of a healthy girl, glad to be wooed.

In her wholesome happiness Rosalind stands in sharp contrast with the melancholy Jaques, in whom sentiment has turned sour. Jaques is one of the characters that Shakspere added to those he took from Lodge's tale. As the playwright must have fitted all his plays, one after another, to the special company of actors for whom they were composed and by whom they were produced, it may not be fanciful to suggest that Jaques was possibly written into the play on purpose to supply a part for some important actor who was a good elocutionist, perhaps for Burbage himself. Certainly Jaques does nothing but stand and deliver speeches; he exists only to talk; he has no function to perform in the plot. He might be cut out without affecting the structure of the story, and yet what would the play be without him? He supplies the element of subacid humor, which contrasts so pleasantly with the happiness of all the rest; and he also is happy in his gift of speech. He finds delight in railing at the world, and he gets obvious pleasure out of the impression he produces upon his hearers, for it can hardly be denied that he is constantly playing to the gallery, improving the occasion for the sake of the effect he is making upon his fellow-exiles.

These associates of his under the greenwood tree understand his ways and they humor his humor. They take him for what he is, waiting to hear what he will say next. They are amused rather than grieved when he proceeds to gird at all mankind, in his speech on the seven ages. Perhaps this rhetorical excursus, this tenor-solo of a sweet nature which has fermented into cynicism, owes its origin to the necessity of filling the time while Orlando is bringing in Adam. In like manner, the learned disquisition of Touchstone upon a lie seven times removed, which seems

hopelessly out of place in the final scene of a play, when everything ought to be hastening to a conclusion, had its origin also in a technical necessity—the need for bridging the gap while Rosalind was changing back into the habiliments of her own sex. The set speech for its own sake was common enough in the Elizabethan drama; but in these two instances Shakspere makes it useful as well as ornamental. Touchstone was also an addition of Shakspere's to the characters of the original story; and he may also have been introduced to supply a part for a special performer.

When Rosalind is made to marry Orlando, the play is over and the plot is promptly wound up in the most peremptory fashion, as though the story itself mattered little. The characters of the semi-tragic underplot whom we have seen at the beginning of the piece are now transformed in the twinkling of an eye in semi-comic fashion, so that the spectators in the yard need not be kept standing any longer. The usurping Duke suddenly sees a great light and experiences a change of heart. The wicked elder brother has his life saved by Orlando, so he also repents on the spot and immediately falls in love with Celia, his brother's bride's friend, and she with him, an even more startling case of love at first sight than Rosalind's and Orlando's. And so the happiest of Shakspere's comedies ends happily, as no one of the audience could ever have doubted from the beginning.

V

'Twelfth Night' differs from the three earlier romantic-comedies, in that its love story is supported by a subplot which is comic rather than semi-tragic, although more

than one character is for a moment in deadly danger. Perhaps the success of 'As you Like it' had shown Shakspere that he did not need to emphasize the serious elements as sharply as he had done in the 'Merchant of Venice' and in 'Much Ado.' And in 'Twelfth Night' he also illustrates his customary economy of invention; that is to say, his constant tendency to employ again devices already approved by experience. Julia in the 'Two Gentlemen of Verona' had anticipated Viola in her disguise as a boy and in then carrying a message from the man she loved to the woman he thought himself in love with. Phœbe in 'As you Like it' had anticipated Olivia in her falling in love with a woman disguised as a man. The likeness of the twins of the 'Comedy of Errors,' a likeness extending even to costume, had already led the one to be taken for the other before a similar confusion befell Viola and Sebastian, sister and brother, who look alike and are dressed alike; and the father of the two Antipholi had adventured himself rashly in a hostile country before Antonio put himself into a similar peril. Even the trick which Maria plays upon Malvolio in making him believe that Olivia is in love with him is closely akin to that played upon Benedick and Beatrice. It is true that these devices are ingeniously varied in 'Twelfth Night,' but it is true also that they had been employed in the earlier plays.

Perhaps because the serious episodes are few and unimportant 'Twelfth Night' has a more obvious harmony of tone than the 'Merchant of Venice' and 'Much Ado.' It is a delicious compound of sentiment and humor shading into one another by exquisite gradations. The exposition is simple and clear. First of all, we learn that Orsino is almost hopelessly in love with Olivia; then we are told of Viola's shipwreck and of her intention to attach herself to

Orsino; and immediately thereafter we are introduced to Olivia's strangely assorted household. A little later the appearance of Sebastian promptly arouses an interest of expectancy. All the threads of the action are then in the hands of the spectator, who can follow the story in security while Viola is falling in love with Orsino and Olivia with the disguised Viola. We can see for ourselves that Olivia is as plain-spoken in declaring her affection for Viola, and later for Viola's brother (who so resembles his sister), as Rosalind was in telling Orlando that he had overcome more than his enemy. Olivia's sending the ring after the disguised Viola is the equivalent of Rosalind's throwing her chain over Orlando's shoulders.

While Olivia is as undaunted in making up to the disguised Viola as Rosalind is in her maidenly avowal to Orlando, Viola's lack of hesitancy in telling Orsino that she has a tender sentiment for him (although she then knows that he thinks himself in love with another woman) is subtler, since he accepts her for a boy and is therefore unable to take her meaning. Viola can put on a bold front when she first meets Olivia, and she can brisk out a pert sentence or two on occasion; but she lacks the demure fun of Rosalind and also Rosalind's flashing wit. Her humor has a tender tinge as becomes her experience of life; it is a humor tinctured with melancholy and shot through with sentiment. She may very well have perceived, with a true woman's swiftness of perception, that Orsino's love for Olivia was lacking in the energy of real passion, contenting itself with longing and sighing. Orsino is not really unhappy in his paraded misery; he is in love with love rather than with Olivia, and he is ripe for a deeper affection for Viola when he shall discover her to be a woman.

His change of heart may be startlingly sudden; and startlingly sudden also is Sebastian's swift flame for Olivia. But neither of these fifth-act conversions is as improbable as the unforeseen marrying off of Celia and Oliver in 'As you Like it.' Viola is a lovely creature, and why should not Orsino become enamoured of her on the spot when he knows her at last for a woman and when he may recall her expressions of affection for him? Olivia is also a beauty; and why should not Sebastian welcome the prize which falls plump into his arms? All that is improbable in 'Twelfth Night' is the celerity of the mating, a celerity almost justified here by the pressure of the action to its conclusion. Besides, these two weddings are only what the spectators have dimly descried and vaguely desired; whereas, in 'As you Like it' the union of Celia and Oliver takes even the audience by surprise, since the playwright has in no wise prepared us for it. In 'Twelfth Night' the dramatist is only availing himself liberally of the privilege of condensing time and of letting us see on the stage in a fifth act what in real life would not have happened until a sixth or a seventh act.

Viola and Olivia were plainly written for the boy actors who had already played Rosalind and Celia, Beatrice and Hero, Portia and Nerissa; and Maria was as obviously composed for the boy actor who had impersonated Mrs. Ford. So the performer of Malvolio may already have appeared as Jaques, the performer of Sir Toby as Dogberry (and perhaps also as Falstaff), and the performer of Sir Andrew as Slender. Feste fell naturally to the man who had acted Touchstone and who was later to undertake the Fool in 'King Lear.'

The more humorous creations are sturdily English in their robust fun, even if they pretend to live in Illyria,

just as Dogberry and Verges had established a fictitious domicile in Messina. Nothing more clearly displays the easy mastery of stage-craft to which Shakspere has now attained than the skill with which he here conjoins the pensive melancholy of Viola's love story with the buxom merriment of Maria's trick upon Malvolio. Viola is the central female figure in the comedy as Malvolio is the central male figure, and they scarcely meet in the course of the play. It is Olivia who serves as the connecting-link between the episode of sentiment and the more robustious underplot; and she performs this artistic function without in any way derogating from her high estate as the second heroine. The author here artfully intertwines a delightful fantasy with the infectious laughter of honest mirth; and he so contrives his action that we are never made aware of any incongruity. He passes from the poetry of sentiment to the prose of riotous humor by imperceptible gradations that never interfere with the pervading unity of tone.

In no other comedy is the group of comic characters more exhilaratingly comic than in 'Twelfth Night.' Here are no longer the traditional figures of earlier English comedy. Shakspere is now able to individualize every character, however unimportant. The jests of these humorous creations are no longer extraneous and casual witticisms; they are evoked by the situation itself or else they are the ripe expression of character revealing itself in dialogue. There is no straining for points, no overt effort, such as is only too evident in the earlier comedies. There is no display of cleverness for its own sake. What the several characters say is what they would say, and not what the author has chosen to put in their mouths; it is what they cannot help saying. The fun is no longer

in the words, even if it is often in the words also; it is even more in the characters themselves than in the situations, amusing as these are. Of course, Shakspere has not ceased to be an Elizabethan; no man may step off his own shadow; and the belief in Malvolio's insanity is treated in accord with the Elizabethan acceptance of madness as comic in itself.

VI

These four plays do not fall into any of the ordinarily accepted classifications; they do not strictly belong to the comedy-of-manners or the comedy-of-sentiment, to the comedy-of-humors or to the comedy-of-character; and they are equally remote from that type of high-comedy which Molière evolved and in which the action is caused by the clash of character on character. They do not conform to Stendhal's dictum that tragedy is the development of an action and comedy the development of a character, which is to be shown by a succession of ideas; for this these four comedies are too full of fantasy, of romance, of poetry. They belong to the type of romantic-comedy, to which Shakspere alone had the clue—even if Musset was able to stray a little way into the path Shakspere had pointed out; and Musset was a lyric poet who was a playwright almost by accident. This romantic-comedy is compounded of capricious fancy and of exuberant humor; it is fundamentally joyous, although it may now and again wander almost to the verge of impending disaster. It bears us away from this workaday world across the gulf of time to a fabled shore where we may find measureless relief from sordid care. It commingles poetry and even pathos with wit and humor. Perhaps the deepest note is

struck in 'Twelfth Night,' the latest of the four, and also the boldest note of skylarking fun. In fact, it needs to be noted that 'Twelfth Night,' which is one of the most pervadingly poetic of Shakspere's comedies, is the last of his plays in which the humor is broad and hearty, the last in which there is any true gaiety or any richly comic characters. For whatever reason, internal or external, his succeeding plays were to take on a more somber color; and when he had finished 'Twelfth Night' he was ready to begin 'Hamlet.'

CHAPTER IX

SHAKSPERE AS AN ACTOR

I

Before dealing with 'Hamlet,' it may be well to pause here to consider Shakspere's own career upon the stage as an actor; since it was in one of these four romantic-comedies that he performed the first part concerning which we have any record. Of course he had been an actor for years before he wrote 'As you Like it,' and even before he made his first venture as a dramatic author; he must have created many parts in his own earlier plays and in the plays of other dramatists produced by the company to which he belonged. But as to these parts we have no information. We have, however, warrant for believing that he did undertake Adam, the old servant of Orlando.

It is one of the most curious coincidences of literary history that the two greatest dramatists of modern times, Shakspere and Molière, should have begun their connection with the theater by going on the stage as actors, without having at first (so far as we can guess) any intention of becoming playwrights. After having acquired practical experience as performers, both of them ventured modestly into dramatic authorship. But to the very end of their careers in the theater they continued to act; Shakspere ceased to appear on the stage only when he left London and retired to Stratford to live the life of a country gentleman, and Molière was stricken fatally while taking part in the fourth performance of his last play.

Molière certainly, and quite possibly Shakspere also, was better known to the playgoers of his own day as an actor than as an author. Molière was the foremost comedian of his day, and there is no dispute about his supremacy as an impersonator of humorous characters. Indeed, his enemies were wont to praise his acting and to disparage his writing; they affected to dismiss his plays as poor things in themselves, owing their undeniable success to the brilliancy of the author's own performance of the chief parts. As actor, as author and as manager Molière was the center of his company. Can as much be said of Shakspere? Great as Molière is as a dramatist, we cannot but feel that Shakspere is still greater. When we note that Molière was preëminent among the players of his age in France, we naturally wonder whether Shakspere was also foremost among the performers of his time in England. Molière is the master of modern comedy, and it was by the impersonation of his own comic characters that he won his widest popularity with the playgoers of Paris. Shakspere is the mightiest of tragic authors. Was he also the chief of the tragedians who held spellbound the gallants and the groundlings thronging to the London theaters in the days of Elizabeth and of James?

That the leader of English playwrights was also the leader of English actors is what we should like to believe in our natural desire to give to him that hath. This desire has led Sir Sidney Lee to remark that when the company of the Globe accepted the royal summons to appear before the queen at Christmas, 1594, Shakspere was then "supported by actors of the highest eminence in their generation." And yet Sir Sidney is frank in expressing his own opinion that the great dramatist "was never to win the laurels of a great actor." He honestly admits that

Shakspere's "histrionic fame had not progressed at the same rate as his literary repute"; and he informs us that when the officials of the court invited the company to perform before Elizabeth, "directions were given that the greatest of the tragic actors of the day, Richard Burbage, and the greatest of the comic actors, William Kemp, were to bear the young actor company." And he adds that "with neither of these was Shakspere's histrionic position then, or at any time, comparable," since "for years they were leaders of the acting profession."

This forces us to the conclusion that in his pardonable longing to glorify Shakspere the biographer has been led into giving us a wrong impression. The queen did not summon Shakspere to appear before her; she summoned the whole company to which Shakspere belonged; and almost certainly it was Burbage and Kemp whom she wanted to see on the stage rather than Shakspere. Burbage and Kemp were the chief ornaments of the company, and although Shakspere was also a member, his position in its ranks does not afford any warrant for the assumption that Elizabeth gave any special thought to him as an actor. What she was desirous of witnessing was a series of performances by a famous company of which Burbage and Kemp were the most famous members. And in this series of performances at court it was Shakspere who supported Burbage and Kemp. It must be noted also that we do not know the program of those performances at court in the last week of 1594, and we are left in doubt whether Shakspere was the author of any one of the plays then presented. Perhaps it is as well to point out further that up to that time he had produced no one of the major masterpieces on which his fame as a dramatist now rests securely.

While Molière composed the chief character in almost every one of his plays for his own acting, Shakspere wrote the chief serious parts in his pieces for Burbage and the chief comic parts for Kemp (until that amusing comedian left the company). For himself he modestly reserved characters of less prominence; in fact, in many of his plays, perhaps even in a majority of them, it is difficult to discover any part which seems to be specially adjusted to his own capacity as an actor. It is well known that Burbage appeared as Hamlet, while Shakspere humbly contented himself with the subordinate part of the Ghost. Who the original Orlando may have been has not yet been ascertained, but tradition tells us that the author of 'As you Like it' impersonated Adam, the faithful old servitor of the hero. And in Ben Jonson's comedy of 'Every Man in his Humour,' which is believed to have been accepted for performance by the company, owing to Shakspere's influence, the part of the elder Knowell is said to have been taken by Shakspere himself; and this seems quite probable, since it was a character which might very well be assumed by the performer of Adam and of the Ghost. These are the only three parts which tradition, not always trustworthy, has ascribed to Shakspere as an actor. They belong, all three of them, to the line of business which is technically known as "old men." And this is the solid support of Sir Sidney Lee's assertion that Shakspere "ordinarily confined his efforts to old men of secondary rank."

II

Shakspere, so his biographer believes, was twenty-two when he left his wife and his three children at Stratford, and trudged up to London to seek his fortune; and he was

probably about twenty-five before his first piece was performed. We have no information as to the means whereby he supported himself when he first arrived in the capital. He may have held horses at the door of the theater, as one tradition has it. Or he may have been able to attach himself at once to one of the half-dozen companies of actors in London, since he might have won friends among their members when one or another of them had appeared at Stratford in the summers immediately preceding his departure from his birthplace. Malone recorded a tradition "that his first office in the theater was that of prompter's attendant"—that is to say, call-boy, as the function is now styled. This may be a fact, of course, but it seems a little unlikely, since a man of twenty-two would be rather mature for such work, easily within the capacity of a lad of fourteen.

If Shakspere left Stratford in 1586 he had already established himself in London as an actor six years later, when he was twenty-eight. It was in 1592 that Chettle, the publisher, apologizing for having issued Greene's posthumous attack on Shakspere, declared that he was "excellent in the qualitie he professes"—that is to say, excellent as an actor. This is high praise for so young a performer; but Chettle's testimony does not carry as much weight as it might, since he is here seeking by frank flattery to make amends for the attack he had previously published. Yet this praise may be taken as evidence that Shakspere by that time had succeeded in achieving a recognized position on the stage as an actor. A tradition—which, however, did not get into print until 1699, more than threescore years and ten after Shakspere's death—declared that he was "better poet than player."

Whether or not he began his career in the theater as a

call-boy, he seems very early to have made choice of the "line of business" which he wished to play. He may have chosen it because he believed himself to be best fitted for parts of that kind, or he may have drifted into the performance of "old men" because there happened at that moment to be a vacancy in the company for a competent performer of these elderly characters. Although the impersonator of these parts is said to play "old men," the characters he is to assume are not all of them stricken in years, even if they are grave and sedate, lacking in the exuberant vivacity of youth. The Ghost, for example, and Adam also, are technically "old men." So are many of the dukes and other chiefs of state, personages of noble bearing and of emphatic dignity. That Shakspere appeared in characters of this type in more than one of his own plays is more than probable. In fact, one John Davies, of Hereford, recorded that Shakspere "played some kingly parts in sport." Just what the words "in sport" may mean must be left to the imagination.

That these austere and lofty characters are known in the theater to-day as "old men" does not imply that the actor who has chosen this line of business is himself elderly. On the contrary, young actors have often deliberately decided to devote themselves to the performance of "old men." The late John Gilbert, for example, long connected with Wallack's Theater in New York, and celebrated for his unrivaled rendering of Sir Peter Teazle and Sir Anthony Absolute, began to impersonate elderly characters before he was twenty. If Shakspere played the Ghost and Adam, and if Gilbert also undertook these characters, then it is possible that certain of the other Shaksperian parts assumed by the American actor as the "old man" of his company may have been originally

written by Shakspere for his own acting. And this leads us to the plausible supposition that Shakspere may have been the original performer of Ægeon in the 'Comedy of Errors,' of Leonato in 'Much Ado about Nothing,' of Baptista in the 'Taming of the Shrew,' of Friar Lawrence in 'Romeo and Juliet,' of the King of France in 'All's Well that Ends Well,' of the Duke in 'Othello,' of the Duke in the 'Merchant of Venice' and possibly also of the Duke in 'Measure for Measure' (although in this last somber comedy it may be that the part which Shakspere performed was one or the other of the two Friars).

The ascription of these characters to Shakspere as an actor may be only a hazardous guess, but it is a guess supported by all the known facts. It is in accordance with the customs of the theatrical profession, which are as the laws of the Medes and Persians. A minute investigation of all his plays by an expert in theatrical history and in histrionic tradition would greatly increase the number of the parts which we have fair warrant for assuming to have been written by Shakspere with an eye to his own acting.

The characters that have been here listed tentatively (and those that may be added to the catalogue) will be found to have certain general characteristics. They are all of them important and they are none of them prominent. The demands they severally made upon the actor who undertook them are not a few; for their proper representation most of them required a dignified presence, a courtly bearing, an air of authority and a large measure of elocutionary skill. But the qualities these parts did not necessitate are equally significant. They called primarily for intelligence and only secondarily, if at all, for any large exhibition of emotion. Now, it is by the power

of expressing passion at the great crises of existence and by the faculty of transmitting his feeling to his audience that the great actor is revealed. If he has not this native gift of communicable emotion he can never be intrusted with the more moving characters of a play. And apparently this native gift was denied to Shakspere, who had so many others. An actor could acquit himself admirably in the Ghost and in Adam and in all the other "old men" which may have been undertaken by Shakspere, he could have performed them to the entire satisfaction of the most critical spectators, without revealing the possession of the vital spark which illuminates the creative work of the truly great actor. In other words, these parts do not demand that the performer of them shall possess more than a moderate share of that mimetic faculty, that fullness of feeling, that amplitude of passion which is the essential qualification for histrionic excellence.

III

To say this is not to suggest that Shakspere had not a keen understanding of the fundamental principles of the art of acting. Such an understanding was his beyond all question, since it is a matter of the intelligence, of intellectual appreciation. We have only to recall the rehearsal of Bottom and his fellows and to read again Hamlet's pregnant advice to the Players. This understanding of the art of acting a playwright must always have or he will fail to get the utmost out of his actors. It is a condition precedent to his success as a writer of stage-plays; and it is possessed by every successful dramatist, by Racine and by Sheridan, by Sardou and by Bronson Howard, by Pinero and by Henry Arthur Jones.

The playwrights must know what can be done with every part in every play of theirs, so that they may then help the performers to attain this. They know what can be done—but it does not follow that they can do it themselves. Their grasp of the principles of the art does not imply that they themselves could act any one of their best parts as they would wish to have this acted. They may be the most skilful of trainers, and yet themselves lack a rich histrionic endowment.

And not merely dramatists but stage-managers—"producers," as they are now styled—may have this faculty of directing and guiding and inspiring performers to achieve their utmost without themselves being capable of doing as actors what they feel ought to be done. Any one at all familiar with stage-history can cite men who have not been eminent as actors and yet who were able to suggest to others how to get the best out of themselves. It was little Bows who taught the Fotheringay the effects which so impressed the youthful Pendennis. It was Samson, a withered comedian of limited range but of keen artistic intelligence, who suggested to Rachel many of her most effective strokes in tragedy.

When we set Hamlet's speech to the Players over against the remarks which Molière made in his own person in the 'Impromptu of Versailles,' we cannot help seeing that these great dramatists were alike in abhorring artificiality in acting, in abominating violence, in detesting rant and in relishing simplicity and apparent naturalness. Both of them inculcated the necessity of truth in the portrayal of character and of passion. Molière attained also to the highest levels of the histrionic art; Shakspere did not, probably because he was wanting in some one of the several physical qualifications which the actor

of dominating parts must have. Apparently he was a well-proportioned man even if not positively good-looking. But his body may have been rebellious to his will, with the result that his gestures, however well intentioned, would be ineffective and even awkward. It may be that it was his voice which was at fault; and a noble organ of speech is almost indispensable to a great actor. In one of his papers on 'Actors and the Art of Acting' (always full of insight into the principles of that little-understood art), George Henry Lewes considered this possibility:

"I dare say he declaimed finely, as far as rhythmic cadence and a nice accentuation went. But his non-success implies that his voice was intractable, or limited in its range. Without a sympathetic voice, no declamation can be effective. The tones which stir us need not be musical, need not be pleasant even, but they must have a penetrating, vibrating quality. Had Shakspere possessed such a voice he would have been famous as an actor. Without it all his other gifts were as nothing on the stage. Had he seen Garrick, Kemble, or Kean performing in plays not his own he might doubtless have perceived a thousand deficiencies in their conception, and defects in their execution; but had he appeared on the same stage with them, even in plays of his own, the audiences would have seen the wide gulf between conception and presentation. One lurid look, one pathetic intonation, would have more power in swaying the emotions of the audience than all the subtle and profound passion which agitated the soul of the poet, but did not manifestly express itself; the look and the tone may come from a man so drunk as to be scarcely able to stand; but the public sees only the look, hears only the tone, and is irresistibly moved by these intelligible symbols."

A little earlier in this same suggestive discussion of 'Shakspere as an Actor and Critic,' Lewes asserted that "Shakspere doubtless knew—none knew so well—how Hamlet, Othello, Richard and Falstaff should be personated; but had he been called upon to personate them he would have found himself wanting in voice, face and temperament. The delicate sensitiveness of his organization, which is implied in the exquisiteness and flexibility of his genius, would absolutely have unfitted him for the presentation of characters demanding a robust vigor and a weighty animalism. It is a vain attempt to paint frescoes with a camel's-hair brush. The broad and massive effects necessary to scenic presentation could never have been produced by such a temperament as his."

Probably it was because Shakspere had the delicate sensitiveness with which Lewes credited him that he had also a distaste for acting—if we may interpret any of the lines of his sonnets as lyric revelations of his own sentiment. The intrigue which we think we can disentangle by a minute analysis of these poems may be feigned and unreal, a mere compliance with a literary fashion of the moment; but there is a sincerer note of personal feeling in the sonnets in which Shakspere seems to be expressing his dislike for the calling by which he made his living. In the hundred-and-tenth sonnet he confessed:

> Alas, 'tis true I have gone here and there
> And made myself a motley to the view.

And in the hundred-and-eleventh, which links itself logically with its predecessor, he appealed for a more tolerant consideration of his character contaminated by the stage:

O, for my sake do you with Fortune chide,
The guilty goddess of my harmfull deeds,
That did not better for my life provide
Than public means what public manners breeds.
Thence comes it that my nature receives a brand;
And almost thence my nature is subdued
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand;
Pity me then and wish I were renew'd.

If Shakspere is here speaking of himself as an actor, if this lyric is really wrung from the bottom of his heart, then we have an ample explanation for his failure to attain to the higher summits of the histrionic art. He did not like his profession; he did not enjoy acting; and we may take it as certain that no man ever won to the front in a calling which he did not love, just as no man ever despised the art in which he excelled. Shakspere's dislike of acting may have been the cause of his lack of mastery or it may have been the consequence of this. Of course, it is dimly possible that we are reading into these sonnets more than Shakspere meant to put into them, and that the quoted lines do not represent his own feelings. And even if they do, they may utter what was only a fleeting disgust for that personal exhibition which is the inseparable condition of acting and from which the practitioners of all the other arts (except oratory) are exempt —a personal exhibition doubly disagreeable to a poet of Shakspere's "delicate sensitiveness."

Perhaps it is not fanciful to find in 'As you Like it' itself evidence in behalf of the contention that Shakspere was not greatly interested in himself as an actor. Adam, who is a character of some importance in the first half of the comedy, most unexpectedly disappears from it in the second half. Now, if the author had been anxious for

ampler histrionic opportunity, it would not have been difficult for him to bring in Adam again toward the end of the play, that he might impress himself more securely on the memory of the audience.

IV

It was probably about 1598 that Shakspere first appeared as Adam and as the elder Knowell, and it was probably about 1602 that he first personated the Ghost, being then thirty-eight years old. He was to remain on the stage ten or twelve years longer, but there is no reason to suppose that the parts he played in later life were any more important. We do not know what characters he undertook in the plays which he wrote after 'Hamlet,' nor do we know what parts he assumed in the many pieces by other authors which made up the repertory of the company. That he continued to act we need not doubt; for instance, he was one of the performers in Ben Jonson's 'Sejanus,' probably produced in 1602 or 1603. But the absence of specific information on this point is evidence that he did not impress himself upon his contemporaries as an actor of power. As Lewes declared, "the mere fact that we hear nothing of his qualities as an actor implies that there was nothing above the line, nothing memorable to be spoken of." The parts which we believe him to have played did not "demand or admit various excellencies." Shakspere may have had lofty histrionic ambitions; but probably he was not allowed to gratify his longings, and certainly we have no tradition or hint that he ever failed in what he attempted in the theater. Perhaps we are justified in believing that he had gone on the stage merely as the easiest means of immediately earning his living, that he

did not greatly care for acting, and that he was satisfied to assume the responsible but subordinate parts for which he was best fitted.

This view of his capacity as an actor is sustained by another consideration. Whatever Shakspere's position as a performer may have been, his later popularity as a playwright is beyond dispute; indeed, his appeal to the playgoing public was so potent that it tempted more than one unscrupulous publisher to put Shakspere's name to plays which were not his. And his position as a member of the company was equally solidly established. All his plays (with one possible and unimportant exception) had been written for this company, to which he had been early admitted, and of which he soon became one of the managers, who had the responsibilities and who shared the profits of the enterprise. He ranked high in the company, and when King James took it under his direct patronage, shortly after his accession in 1603, Shakspere's name is the second on the list of actors as it appears on the royal warrant, and Burbage's is third. There is ample evidence that he was held in high esteem by his comrades of the theater. That he had a warm regard for them is shown by the fact that in his will he left money to Burbage, Condell and Heming for the purchase of memorial rings. That they cherished his memory is proved by the publication (seven years after his death) of the folio edition of his complete plays, due to the pious care of Condell and Heming. Shakspere had the gift of friendship and he bound his fellows to him with hoops of steel. Outside of the theater also he was widely liked; and the personal references to him which have been gleaned from contemporary writers, however inadequate they may seem to us nowadays in appreciation of his genius, are

abundant in expressions of regard for the man, for his gentleness and his courtesy.

Now, if Shakspere was popular with his fellow-actors, with the playgoing public, with those he met outside the theater, there is no other possible explanation of the fact that he did not take the chief parts in at least a few of his own plays except that he was either incapable of so doing or not desirous of attempting to. We have only to consider the history of the theater to discover that every actor-playwright, from Molière to Boucicault and Gillette, who had both ambition and ability composed the central characters of his own plays for his own acting. This is what has happened always in the past, and it is what must happen whenever a gifted actor takes to writing or whenever a gifted writer takes to acting. If therefore Shakspere did not himself undertake Richard III or Hamlet or Lear or any other overwhelming part, but devised them rather for the acting of Burbage, we are forced to the conclusion that he knew himself unfitted for them, and that his comrades in the theater, his fellow-managers, knew this also. In other words, Shakspere appeared as Adam and as the Ghost, and he confined his acting to "old men," because these parts were well within his physical limitations. This conclusion, that the greatest of dramatists was not also great as an actor, may be unwelcome, but there seems to be no escape from it.

V

For Shakspere himself, however, if not for his modern admirers, there was one obvious compensation. He may not have been fond of the art, he may even have disliked the practice of his profession, and he may not have revealed

himself as a performer of more than respectable ability; but he owed to acting the solid foundation of his fortune. He went to London in his youth with no visible means of support, although already burdened with a wife and three children; and he went back to Stratford not only well-to-do, but probably better off than any other resident of the little town. Even if Shakspere was not a great actor, it was as an actor that he gained entrance into the theater, that he acquired that intimate familiarity with stage-technic which is evident in his masterpieces, and that he was able to get his successive plays swiftly produced by the very actors for whose performance he had specially devised them. It is because he was an actor that he was able speedily to make his way as a playwright; and it was because he was valuable to the company as actor and as playwright that he was admitted partner in the undertaking. If he had not become an actor, he might or he might not have written 'Hamlet' and 'Julius Cæsar' and 'As you Like it,' but he probably would never have been able to buy New Place, to get a grant of arms for his father, and to spend the final years of his life in leisure. And we may rest assured that Shakspere himself recognized all the advantage it was to him to be an actor, even if he did affect in one or another of his sonnets to rail against the disadvantages. Great poet as he was, he was also a good man of business, with a keen eye to the main chance.

Shakspere had three sources of income—as an actor, as an author and as one of the managers. Sir Sidney Lee has calculated that in the earlier years of Shakspere's connection with the theater he received at least a hundred pounds a year as a performer and at least twenty pounds more as a playwright, with possibly some slight additional

income from the sale of his poems (which were repeatedly reprinted). Allowing for the greater purchasing power of money in those days, we may assume that this gave Shakspere an annual income about equivalent to five thousand dollars to-day. Later the price paid for plays rose, and by that time Shakspere had become one of the partners in the theater. When the Globe was built, in 1599, it was leased to certain associated actors, of whom Shakspere was one; and the profits were to be divided into sixteen shares, of which Shakspere certainly had one, and possibly one and a half or even two. (It may be noted that Molière was also a sharer of the profits of the company with which he acted and which produced all his plays; and it is on record that when he asked to have two shares allotted to him the request was granted by his comrades.) There is a likelihood that Shakspere took upon himself a portion of the labor of stage-management and of producing new plays; and although the customs of the Elizabethan theater made this task less burdensome than it is to-day, still it was worthy of some remuneration. Sir Sidney Lee, a most competent judge, has estimated Shakspere's annual income in the final years of his career in London before he left the stage altogether for return to Stratford as probably about six hundred pounds a year, and this is roughly equivalent to twenty-four thousand dollars of our money. And in this estimate he did not include the large profits from Shakspere's two shares in the smaller Blackfriars Theater or the return from his accumulated savings. That Shakspere in his youth had gone on the stage as an actor proved to be as profitable for his pocket as it was helpful to his mastery of stage-craft.

CHAPTER X

SHAKSPERE'S ACTORS

I

It would be interesting if we could also ascertain the names of the original performers of the important parts in all Shakspere's plays. Here our information is pitiably scant. There were in those days no printed playbills in the theater itself; and there were no theatrical criticisms in the newspapers, for the sufficient reason that there were no newspapers. When a play was published it rarely contained a list of the characters carrying on its plot; in the First Folio such a list is appended to only two or three of Shakspere's pieces, the 'Winter's Tale' for one and the second part of 'Henry IV' for another. And even when the list of characters is given there is no indication of the names of the performers who played the several parts.

Yet even if our information is scant, it is not wholly lacking. From an elegy written upon the death of Richard Burbage we learn, what we might have inferred without this positive assurance, that he was the performer of Hamlet, Othello and King Lear, and another poem of the period authorizes us to believe that he also played Richard III. In the First Folio 'Romeo and Juliet' in the fourth act the stage-direction reads "enter Peter," whereas in the second and third quartos the stage-direction reads "enter Will Kempe"; and we have no right to doubt that Kemp was the original actor of Peter. In 'Much Ado

about Nothing' a similar slip supplies us with two similar identifications of an actor with a part: in the fourth act, when the watch enters, the speeches of Dogberry and Verges are assigned to Kemp and Cowley, the names of the performers themselves carelessly appearing in place of the names of the characters they were impersonating. And earlier in the same play, in the second act, the stage-direction reads, "enter Prince, Leonato, Claudio and Jacke Wilson," which is evidence that Wilson was the performer of the part of Balthasar (who sings "Sigh no more, ladies; sigh no more"). Another slip of the same kind informs us that the servant who enters in the third act of the 'Taming of the Shrew' was played by an actor known in the theater as "Nick."

It may be noted that Will Kemp resigned about 1598, and that his place was taken by Robert Armin, who seems to have been connected with the company off and on for at least ten years. In the dedication of a play of Armin's published in 1609 he discloses the fact that he had impersonated Dogberry; it is likely, therefore, that he succeeded to all of Kemp's characters when he joined the company after Kemp had left it.

In the quarto edition of Ben Jonson's 'Every Man in His Humour,' printed in 1603, there is a list of the actors who appeared in this play: "Will. Shakspeare, Aug. Philips, Hen. Condel, Will. Slye, Will Kempe, Ric. Burbage, J. Hemings, Thos. Pope, Chr. Beeston, and John Duke." The play had been produced by the company to which Shakspere belonged in 1598, and the list given in 1603 is probably an incomplete roster of the company as it was in 1598, since it includes Kemp, who seems to have withdrawn shortly after Jonson's comedy was first performed. When Jonson's tragedy of 'Sejanus' was published in

1605, the final page tells us that "this Tragaedie was first acted in the yeere 1603 By the King's Majesties Servants" and that "the principal Tragaedians were Ric. Burbadge, Aug. Philips, Will. Sly, Joh. Lowin, Will. Shakes-peare, Joh. Hemings, Hen. Condel, Alex. Cooke." Mention must be made also of the fact that the 'Seven Deadly Sins' (acted in all probability in 1592) had among its performers Burbage, Philips, Pope, Condell, Cowley, Sly, Duke and Bryan.

In the First Folio we have a list of "the names of the Principall Actors in all these Plays" arranged in two columns:

William Shakespeare	Samuel Gilburne
Richard Burbage	Robert Armin
John Hemmings	William Ostler
Augustine Phillips	Nathan Field
William Kempt	John Underwood
Thomas Poope	Nicholas Tooley
George Bryan	William Ecclestone
Henry Condell	Joseph Taylor
William Slye	Robert Benfield
Richard Cowly	Robert Goughe
John Lowine	Richard Robinson
Samuell Crosse	John Shancke
Alexander Cooke	John Rice

But this list is not absolutely complete, since it omits the names of John Duke, Christopher Beeston and John Sinkler. Also to be noted is the fact that it contains the names of actors probably not in the company at the same time; Kemp and Armin, for example. It may be doubted whether the company ever numbered as many as twenty-six, even at its fullest strength. The usual number was probably not more than fifteen. A single actor

would often appear in two or more of the less important parts. The suggestion has even been made that one actor, possibly Wilson, thus "doubled" Cordelia and the Fool.

II

Apparently it was about 1590 that Shakspere joined the company, when certain of its leading members had already been associated for some years. It had been organized before the Burbages built the first Theater in 1576, the materials of which were used in the erection of the Globe twenty years later. It bore various titles, being called Lord Strange's men, Lord Derby's and Lord Hunsdon's, and the Lord Chamberlain's company; and finally, in 1603, after the accession of James, it was authorized to call itself the King's Players. In London, it acted not only at the Theater and the Rose, and then at the Globe, but still later also at the Blackfriars. It went on frequent strolling expeditions in the provinces; and it may have given performances in Stratford when Shakspere was still a resident in his native town. But although it altered its name from time to time, and although it acted in different places, it retained its membership for a score of years after 1590 with comparatively few changes. It seems to have been well chosen at the start and to have been skilfully recruited as vacancies were caused by retirement or by death. Its half dozen or half score chief members, the "sharers" or associated managers, who hired the boys and subordinate performers, were not only good actors, they were also men of good character bound by ties of friendship as well as of interest. Its leading actors were partners in the management and in the very considerable profits of the enterprise. In fact, in its or-

ganization, in the qualities of its constituent elements, in its enduring solidarity it bears a striking likeness to the company which Molière brought back to Paris in 1658 and which still survives as the Comédie-Française. Theatrical conditions in London, when Shakspere retired in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, did not widely differ from those in Paris when Molière died toward the end of the third quarter of that century; but theatrical conditions then were very different from theatrical conditions now. To-day, in the first quarter of the twentieth century, there is not to be seen in London or in New York a single permanent company, and in Paris there is but one which is substantially the same year after year.

Nowadays a special company is engaged for every new play that is produced and for every important revival. To-day there is a vast body of unemployed actors and actresses from whom the manager can select the performers best suited to the several parts of the piece he is about to bring out; and the dramatist composes his play, having in mind special actors only for one or more of the salient characters, knowing that there will be no difficulty in securing fairly satisfactory performers for the less important parts. But in Shakspere's time, as in Molière's, there were at call few disengaged performers of merit; most of the available actors were already attached to one or another of the existing companies in London or in the provinces. The dramatist, therefore, composed his play specifically for the members of some one of these companies, perforce adjusting the parts to the performers who were originally to undertake them, and carefully refraining from the introduction of any part for which there was not a fit performer already in the company. What is now

known as a "special engagement" was then impossible, because it would not have been profitable, since the company kept all its successful plays in repertory, ready for immediate performance in its own theater in London and in any convenient hall in the country towns when it went on its frequent strolling excursions. In London fifteen to twenty new plays were produced by a company every season; and no one of them had more than fifteen or twenty performances, scattered through the year, and never consecutive.

It has been pointed out that Molière has no maternal love in any of his plays, because his company did not contain any "old woman"; and the elderly females who do appear now and again in his comedies were all of them highly colored so that they could be performed by a male actor, in accord with medieval tradition still surviving in the French theater during the seventeenth century. Shakspere, like Molière, composed all his plays for one particular company, that to which he himself belonged. We may rest assured that Shakspere and Molière rarely wrote any part for which there was not a proper performer already in the company. We may feel certain also that Shakspere, like Molière, fitted the characters in his comedies and his tragedies to the special actors for whom he intended them. As the repertory was large and as the program was changed daily, it is probable that a prominent actor was not unwilling now and again to appear in a part of less prominence than his importance in the theater would warrant; and it may be noted that this was the practice in the famous Meiningen company toward the end of the nineteenth century.

We know very little about the histrionic ability of the members of the company for which Shakspere wrote.

We have no record of the manner in which Burbage acted Othello and Lear, or of the method of Kemp in Peter and Dogberry. Yet with the evidence of Shakspere's plays before us, and with our knowledge of the extraordinary demands they make upon the performers, we are justified in believing that the company must have been very strong indeed, rich in actors of varied accomplishment. We should have the same conviction in regard to Molière's company, on the sole testimony of his plays, even if we were without the abundant contemporary evidence to the merits of Molière and his wife, of La Grange and Madeleine Béjart. By the fact that Shakspere wrote Othello and Lear and Hamlet for Burbage we are debarred from any right to doubt that Burbage was a great tragedian. The parts that Shakspere composed for Kemp, and later for Armin, may be taken as proof positive that these two actors had a broad vein of humor like that which Charles Lamb relished in Dowton. The swift succession of Portia and Beatrice, Rosalind and Viola, is irrefragable testimony to the histrionic capacity of the shaven lad who impersonated these lovely creatures one after another. A good company it must have been, that for which Shakspere wrote his twoscore histories and comedies and tragedies, filled with superb parts stimulating to the ambition of the actors who were his associates; and it was a good all-round company also, versatile and energetic.

That Shakspere fitted these actors with parts, that he adjusted his characters to the capacity of the performers, that he was moved in his choice of subject by his intimate knowledge of the histrionic capability of his fellow-actors, and perhaps also by their expressed desire for more ambitious opportunities, this is surely beyond question, since we know that it is just what Molière did in his day and

just what every dramatist has done and must do. The author of 'Ralph Roister Doister' was head-master of Eton; and he put together that piece of boisterous fun-making for the crude acting of his robustious young scholars. Lyly's more delicate comedies were most of them composed for performance by choir-boys; and they are found to be devoid of any violence of emotion which might be beyond the power of youthful inexperience. What may be observed in the seventeenth century can be seen also in the nineteenth; and the best of Labiche's farces were not more closely adjusted to the company at the Palais Royal than were the later plays of the younger Dumas adjusted to the incomparable assembly of actors at the Théâtre Français.

Just as Mr. Crummles, having bought a pump cheap, insisted upon the introduction of that implement into the next play which Nicholas Nickleby adapted for his company, so every dramatist is moved, perhaps more or less unconsciously, to utilize the gifts of the actors for whom he is working. If one of them is a trained singer, a Jack Wilson, then he is tempted to write in a part for that performer and so give him one or more songs. This fact was seized by the acute intellect of James Spedding, who once wrote a letter to Furnivall in criticism of the latter's attempt to classify Shakspere's plays in chronological order in accordance with the mood of the dramatist at the time when they were written. Spedding insisted that the distinguishing feature of every play "would depend upon many things besides the author's state of mind. It would depend upon the story which he had to tell; and the choice of the story would depend upon the requirements of the theater, the taste of the public, the popularity of the different actors, the strength of the company. A new

part might be wanted for Burbage or Kemp. The two boys that acted Hermia and Helena—the tall and the short one—or the two men who were so alike that they might be mistaken for each other, might want new pieces to appear in; and so on."

The vice of the narrowly philosophic criticism of Shakspere, which was so prevalent in the nineteenth century, lies in its consideration of his characters solely and exclusively as characters. They are characters, of course, but they are also parts prepared for particular actors. They form a succession of magnificent parts, making the most varied demand upon these actors. They are parts, first of all, conceived in consonance with their author's intimate knowledge of the histrionic abilities of his fellow-players, even if every one of them is also a character, subtler and broader and deeper than any mere part needs to be. In devising these parts Shakspere was fitting the performers of the company to which he belonged, even if he was also availing himself of the opportunity to body forth his own vision of life.

III

When we have once grasped the significance of the relation of the author and the actor our disappointment is redoubled that we know so little about the various members of Shakspere's company. Our acquaintance with the career of Coquelin helps us to understand the structure of Cyrano de Bergerac, just as our familiarity with the needs of Macready as an actor-manager help to eludicate the qualities of 'Richelieu' and 'Money.' But we do not know Burbage and Kemp, Heming and Armin, as we know Macready and Coquelin. Instead of being able to explain their parts in some measure by their personalities

and by their abilities, we are forced to guess at their personalities and their abilities by an analysis of the parts which Shakspere intrusted to them. And here again we are at sea, since we lack detailed information as to the parts they severally performed.

Yet there are a few things which we may fairly infer, without involving ourselves in the fog of dangerous conjecture. If Burbage was the original impersonator of Hamlet and Lear, of Othello and Richard III, we may assume that he was also the original performer of all Shakspere's tragic heroes, of Romeo and Richard II, Macbeth and Brutus. Burbage played early in the seventeenth century all the parts which were undertaken toward the end of the nineteenth century by Booth and Irving—with the possible exception only of Shylock, which seems to have been in its author's intent a seriocomic character, at once grim and grotesque, and which therefore might fall to the lot of the actor who had appeared as Falstaff or else to the habitual impersonator of villains. Burbage left behind him the reputation of the foremost tragedian of his time; and since he was intrusted by Shakspere with these overwhelming characters, one after another, he must have been a great actor, noble in bearing, eloquent in delivery, passionate and versatile. As he grew older, so did the characters which Shakspere composed for him to act, Romeo having been written for him in his ardent and energetic youth, while Lear was prepared later in his riper maturity. After his death, in 1619, his parts seem to have been divided between Lowin and Taylor.

Just as we may feel safe in assuming that Burbage impersonated all Shakspere's tragic heroes, because we know that he played Hamlet and Othello, so we are justified in

assigning a succession of comic characters in Shakspere's earliest comedies to Kemp because of our knowledge that he appeared as Peter and Dogberry. There is a strong family likeness between Peter and a group of other low-comedy parts, composed at no great interval before or after 'Romeo and Juliet'—simple figures of fun, mere "clowns," as they were then called, quick in quips, but lacking altogether the mellower humor of Shakspere's later comic characters. Since Kemp was the original Peter, it is reasonable to suppose that he was also one of the two Dromios and one of the two Gobbos, and that he appeared either as Costard or Dull in 'Love's Labour's Lost,' and either as Launce or Speed in the 'Two Gentlemen of Verona.' And we can find confirmation for this surmise in the disappearance of this sort of part from Shakspere's plays after Kemp left the company, to be replaced by Armin. No doubt Armin took over all these earlier parts whenever the older plays were performed; but in the new plays the corresponding characters—Touchstone, for example, the Grave-digger in 'Hamlet' and the Porter in 'Macbeth'—are less frivolous, almost graver in their method. Nowadays the comedian who acts Touchstone also acts Sir Toby Belch, and it is inherently likely that Armin was the original of that unctuously humorous character, although this part may have been cast to the original performer of Falstaff (possibly Heming). There is to be noted in Molière's plays a curious parallel to this modification of the low-comedy parts in Shakspere's plays after Armin had succeeded Kemp. Molière composed all his earlier soubrettes, his exuberant serving-maids, for Madeleine Béjart; and after her death, when her place was taken by Mademoiselle Beauval, who had less authority and a more contagious

gaiety, the soubrettes in these later comedies change in tone to adjust themselves to the different gifts of the new actress.

One other piece of information is also in our possession: the Balthasar, who sings in 'Much Ado,' was played by Jack Wilson. From this we may fairly assume that Wilson also appeared as Amiens, who sings in 'As you Like it,' and as Feste, who sings in 'Twelfth Night.' This assumption is strengthened by the fact that 'Much Ado,' 'As you Like it' and 'Twelfth Night' are closely related, having been composed rapidly one after the other. Then, if we choose, we may risk a more daring speculation—that Wilson was also the actor who created a little later the part of the Fool in 'King Lear,' since this character is called upon for frequent snatches of song.

In dealing with Burbage and Wilson, with Kemp and Armin, we are on fairly solid ground; that is to say, we are making inferences from known facts. But when we desire to push our investigations further our footing is less secure; yet it is not impossible to venture a little distance in advance. At least, there are a few questions which we may put to ourselves with advantage, even though we may not be completely satisfied by the best answers that we can find. For example, the original performer of Falstaff—Heming or another—was possibly the original performer of Shylock, and probably the original performer of Sir Toby. This creates a likelihood that he had also impersonated Bottom. It is also not unlikely that he was intrusted with the Dromio that Kemp did not play, and also with either Launce or Speed, Costard or Dull. And he seems to be the performer who would naturally be called upon later to impersonate Caliban.

IV

We can also get a little light upon the probable organization of the company at the Globe when Shakspere was a member of it by considering the organization of Drury Lane when Sheridan was its manager and when the stock-company system was in its prime. Indeed, a similar organization is to be observed to-day in the many minor stock companies scattered throughout the United States. The governing principle in Drury Lane and in the modern theaters occupied by stock companies is that every one of the several actors has his own "line of business," as it is called; that is to say, he confines himself to a certain definite class of characters. When an old play is revived, and even when a new play is produced, the actor is generally able to recognize at a glance the part to which he is entitled. The "leading man" and the "leading lady" expect, of course, to impersonate the hero and the heroine. The "low comedian" is ready at once to undertake the broadly comic character, and the "soubrette" (or "chambermaid") is equally ready to assume the corresponding female part. The villain falls to the lot of the "heavy man." The "old man" and the "old woman" naturally assume the more elderly characters. The "light comedy" part is the privilege of one actor, and the "character part" is the duty of another. In a large company there would be also a "second low comedian," a "second old man," and so on, besides several trustworthy performers known as "responsible utilities."

This organization is efficient, and its influence can be detected very clearly in the English drama until the final years of the nineteenth century, when the stock-company

system was abolished in the more important theaters of London and New York. It was not absolutely rigid, of course; and now and again an actor of exceptional power and range did not hesitate to undertake parts not strictly in his own "line of business." John Kemble, for example, the foremost tragedian of his time, liked to appear in the light comedy part of Charles Surface, a performance which was wittily described as "Charles's Martyrdom." His brother, Charles Kemble, the foremost light comedian of his time, had an infelicitous aspiration for tragic characters. But even if this method of distributing the several parts in a play among the several members of the company was not absolutely fixt and final, it was generally acceptable. The departures from the rules were infrequent in Drury Lane under Sheridan; and we have no reason to doubt that they were quite as infrequent in the Globe when Shakspere was writing his plays for its company.

The line of business which any one of Shakspere's fellow-actors undertook would be the same, of course, whether the play were written by Shakspere himself or by another playwright. Therefore, if we could discover any part played by any one of these actors in a piece not by Shakspere, we might guess at the line of business he was in the habit of playing and thus we might infer that he may have been the original performer of those Shaksperian characters which plainly belong to the particular line of business. Now, there is a little evidence of this sort. We know, for example, that Burbage played Hieronimo in the 'Spanish Tragedy'; and this would give us warrant for believing that he played Hamlet and Othello, even if we had not more emphatic testimony. We know also that Condell played the Cardinal in Web-

ster's 'Duchess of Malfi,' which is a "heavy" part, a stage villain of the deepest dye. If we may assume from this that Condell was the regular performer of "heavies," then we may venture to ascribe to him not a few of Shakspere's villains—Edmund in 'King Lear' and, above all, Iago. We may even go further and suggest the probability that he was also the original performer of Don John in 'Much Ado,' of the usurping Duke in 'As you Like it' and of the King in 'Hamlet.'

Unfortunately, we have no clue as significant as this to guide us to a guess as to the original performer of another line of business, very important in Shakspere's plays —that of "juvenile lead" or "light comedy." Some of the parts seem to belong to one group and some to another, yet they were probably played by the same actor in Shakspere's company, since they are now generally undertaken by the same actor in our modern companies. These are the parts in which Charles Kemble excelled; they are the parts in which Edwin Adams and Lawrence Barrett supported Booth and in which Terriss and Alexander supported Irving. In the tragedies these characters are Laertes, Richmond, Cassio and Mercutio; and in the comedies they are Gratiano, Claudio and Orsino. And the same actor would logically be intrusted also with Faulconbridge, with Hotspur, and probably with Bolingbroke. These are most of them characters which require for their adequate rendition youth and fire, vigor and vivacity, wit and grace. We may never discover the name of the actor who created these parts, but that they were all of them created by one and the same performer seems highly probable. To those who are familiar with the inner workings of the theater there will be nothing fanciful in the suggestion that the "tag"—the final speech

—of the 'Merchant of Venice' may have been given to Gratiano as some compensation to this actor for the early killing off of Mercutio, in 'Romeo and Juliet,' the play which almost immediately preceded the 'Merchant of Venice.' In general the tag is given by Shakspere to the most important of the surviving characters.

As to the several boys who were intrusted with Shakspere's women we are absolutely in the dark. We can see with Spedding that there were in company at one time two lads who appeared as the comedy heroines, one of them taller than the other; LeBeau tells Orlando that Celia is taller than Rosalind, and Hero is repeatedly called short. To one or another of these boys were committed also Portia and Jessica, Viola and Olivia, Mrs. Page and Anne Page. Mrs. Ford must have fallen to the lot of a third lad, who was later to display his captivating humor as Maria in 'Twelfth Night,' having already appeared as the laughing Nerissa in the 'Merchant of Venice' and as the giggling Audrey in 'As you Like it.' But which of these three boys was bold enough to undertake Cleopatra or Lady Macbeth?

It is not difficult to believe that the Queen Margaret who curses so copiously was impersonated by the young fellow who was soon after to appear as Kate the curst. What became of this lad, and of the others also, when their voices cracked and they grew to manhood? Probably most of them remained in the company and took to male characters, returning on occasion to the other sex when there arrived a strongly marked part for an "old woman"—a part which did not demand actual youth. One such actor, boy or man, must have created the Nurse in 'Romeo and Juliet,' the various Mrs. Quicklys in the two parts of 'Henry IV,' in 'Henry V' and in the 'Merry

Wives,' and Mrs. Overdone in 'Measure for Measure,' characters closely akin in their oily humor.

A few further suggestions may be risked. It seems highly probable that the performer who was the original Slender in the 'Merry Wives' was also the creator of Sir Andrew Aguecheek in 'Twelfth Night,' of Le Beau in 'As you Like it' and of Osric in 'Hamlet.' We may also venture the surmise that the actor who created Christopher Sly in the induction of the 'Taming of the Shrew' had also created one of the strongly marked comic characters in the Falstaff plays, Nym or Pistol, but more probably Bardolph.

These scattered suggestions may seem fantastic. They are suggestions only, hypotheses which may be verified by further investigation or which may be contradicted by more diligent research. The inquiry here initiated modestly can be pushed further; for example, we have some information as to the actors who personated the chief parts in certain of the Beaumont and Fletcher plays, and a study of these parts may indicate the lines of business they were in the habit of playing and thus point to their possible Shaksperian parts. Such an inquiry is likely to increase our knowledge of the theatrical conditions under which Shakspere worked and to which he had to conform.

CHAPTER XI

'HAMLET'

I

The four romantic-comedies were the natural outflowering from Shakspere's earlier and less ambitious efforts to combine sentiment and humor; 'Love's Labour's Lost' made the path straight for 'Much Ado,' and 'Twelfth Night' declares itself as a logical growth from the 'Two Gentlemen.' 'Romeo and Juliet,' which preceded the romantic-comedies, had had no such forerunners; it disclosed a sudden expansion of Shakspere's powers in a field into which he had not before entered; and as much must also be asserted of 'Hamlet.' Nothing that he had composed prior to the production of 'Hamlet' foretold the power he was therein to display. There is scarcely an intimation in any preceding piece of the great gifts revealed in 'Hamlet'—the essential energy of imagination which gives breadth and depth to the tragedy we accept to-day as perhaps his most significant achievement in his art. 'Romeo and Juliet' stirs the heart, but 'Hamlet' also stimulates the mind and uplifts the soul.

In Shakspere's career 'Hamlet' is almost as striking a manifestation of the ripening of his genius as is 'Tartuffe' in the corresponding career of Molière. Possibly the unexpectedness of the development is even more startling in Molière's case than in Shakspere's, since no one of his earlier plays contained any promise of 'Tartuffe,' whereas Shakspere in putting forth 'Hamlet' was now doing

skilfully what he had already very crudely attempted in 'Titus Andronicus'; that is to say, he was working over an earlier revenge-play of an already established popularity in the playhouse. And in both cases the older play was a violent tragedy-of-blood. In 'Titus Andronicus' Shakspere seems to have been content merely to revise this older piece, improving it in detail, no doubt, but leaving it very much as he found it. 'Hamlet' he made over, using it for riper self-expression.

He had put little or nothing of himself into 'Titus Andronicus'—so little, indeed, that few of us would be tempted to ascribe the piece to him if we did not know it to be his. Into 'Hamlet' as a play, and even into Hamlet as a character, Shakspere, as we cannot help feeling, put more of himself than into any other of his works. Of course we have no right ever to identify a dramatist with any of his characters, however irresistible the temptation may appear now and again; he is truly a dramatist only because he is able to breathe the breath of life into creatures utterly unlike himself. Self-revelation is the province of the lyric poet, not of the dramatic; and yet there are to be discovered characters in the works of the greatest dramatists in which we can see—or think we can see—unconscious self-portraiture, and in which we believe ourselves to be catching an echo of the poet's own voice.

Coquelin, the finest interpreter of Molière in our day, and also an alert student of Shakspere, used to say that three times, and three times only, had Shakspere not been able to keep himself out of his own plays. The French comedian held that in the fiery ardor of Romeo, Shakspere set before us his own youthful exuberance; that in Hamlet we have Shakspere in the full flower of thoughtful man-

hood, weighed down by the insoluble problems of the universe; and that Prospero serves to suggest to us what Shakspere became in the disenchanted and tolerant years just before his retirement from the stage. Romeo, Hamlet, Prospero, each of these in its turn contains some portion of the poet himself at varying periods of his mental and moral growth. This much we may admit, even if we acknowledge the danger of admitting any more than this, that these three figures appear to be characteristic of the poet himself at the moment when they were projected by him.

II

Shakspere was more fortunate in 'Hamlet' than Molière in the 'Misanthrope,' perhaps because he did not trouble to invent a plot for the play in which he was to put even more of himself than Molière was to put into the 'Misanthrope.' In fact, it is a wonderful stroke of good luck that Shakspere was attracted to this story at the very hour when he had welling up within him the feelings and the thoughts that Hamlet was to utter. He may have turned to it of his own accord, or he may have been urged to remake the old play by his fellow-managers. He finds in the older 'Hamlet' (now lost to us, although we have come to a fair knowledge of its elements) not only an alluring story, but also a plot cleverly put together. The earlier piece, derived directly from a French tragic tale and indirectly from a chronicler, conformed as strictly to the type of the revenge-play as the 'Spanish Tragedy' itself, the popularity of which it rivaled. The play Shakspere makes out of this old piece has all the earmarks of the tragedy-of-blood—the revenge motive, the dark plottings, the assumed insanity, the play-within-the-play, the frequent

fights and the incessant assassinations. Every one of these elements of interest Shakspere retains without hesitation, and yet he manages somehow to purge this brutal farrago of its cruel horrors and to bestow on the tragedy he made out of this melodrama the terror proper to tragedy. He so transforms 'Hamlet' that it abides as an enduring example of the truly poetic drama, at once dramatic and poetic. The philosophy that we find in it, the psychology, the poetry, are all integral; they belong to the subject as he sees it; they are not externally applied.

The critic who once asserted that the skeleton of every good play is a pantomime might have had 'Hamlet' in mind when he declared this truth. The visual appeal of the story itself, of the swift succession of its interesting incidents, would be effective if the play were acted before the inmates of a deaf-and-dumb asylum, or if it were merely projected on the screen of a moving-picture show. From the admirable opening scene, when the Ghost appears to Horatio and Marcellus, a scene which takes us at once into the core of the action up to the performance of the play-within-a-play which Claudius interrupts, thus confirming what the Ghost had told Hamlet, the interest of the plot steadily becomes tenser and tenser. The sequence of ingenious situations would rivet the attention of the audience even if the characters were empty puppets. The essential struggle, the clash of opposing volitions, is set before us sharply from the very first, and we wait with anxiety the issue of the contest. The background is unfailingly romantic and picturesque, while the chief character is a fellow-creature with whom we can sympathize. There may be a slight relaxing of interest in the fourth act due to the fact that attention is not there centered on

Hamlet himself. But the action tightens again as it draws toward the inevitable end; and the fencing-match with the envenomed foils, followed by the poisoned cup and Hamlet's killing of the King at last—these clear the stage for the entrance of young Fortinbras and for his eulogy of the dead prince, a final episode which recalls that diminuendo of tragic intensity characteristic of the final moments in the greatest Greek dramas (more especially the 'Œdipus' of Sophocles).

Shakspere is here doing what Sophocles had done before him; he is taking a myth familiar to the audience in almost all its details and telling it anew with a deeper meaning. He is not taxing his invention, but employing his imagination on the nobler task of interpreting what had been invented by others. In itself the story is crudely melodramatic and the characters are no more vital than the plot required them to be. In Shakspere's hands the plot retains all the adroitness of its mechanism, and yet it ceases to be of predominating importance, since the succeeding situations seem now to be caused by the characters themselves, who bring about most of the several episodes one after another by sheer force of their several individualities. What had been a bare and barren melodrama becomes now a true tragedy, lifted up into the lofty ether of eternal poetry, yet without leaving behind the skeleton of action which lends strength to its structure. If we did not know the contrary, we might believe that Shakspere, having first conceived the character of Hamlet, had then set himself to compose a plot in which this character could most adequately express himself. That this was not Shakspere's procedure is added evidence that it matters little whether a dramatic poet begins with character or with plot, so long as he ends by making the characters

true to themselves and by keeping the plot subordinate to them. Shakspere takes a story amplified and articulated by another hand, and he makes this his own by the soaring imagination which perceived the ulterior significance of the enigmatic figure of Hamlet himself. As it stands, the play is what it is, and its episodes follow one after another as they do simply because Hamlet is what he is.

III

Victor Hugo once declared that there were three classes of playgoers—the crowd, which demands action; women, who want emotion; and thinkers, who seek for character. To all three of these classes 'Hamlet' is satisfactory: it is incessant in action; it is vibrating with passion; and it is rich in character. The personality of Hamlet himself is at once permanent and universal. Even though no one of us has been called upon to undertake the dread task of avenging a father's murder, we can all see ourselves in Hamlet. The more we know about life and the more we feel ourselves baffled by its inscrutability, the better fitted we are to understand Hamlet and to feel with him.

And yet it is only in this humanizing of Hamlet himself that Shakspere exhibits any overt originality. All the separate elements of the plot were familiar to Tudor playgoers, not only in the drama which Shakspere was reworking, but in not a few other pieces produced immediately before 'Hamlet.' "Revenge, directed by a ghost, hesitation on the part of the hero, insanity real or feigned, intrigue, copious bloodshed, a secondary revenge plot, meditative philosophizing in the form of soliloquies, were all essential elements, probably of the Kydian 'Hamlet,' certainly of several other revenge-plays," so Professor

Thorndike has pointed out. "The refusal of an opportunity to kill the villain, the songs and wild talk of a mad woman, the murder of an innocent intruder, scenes in a churchyard, the appearance of the ghost to soldiers of the watch, the play-within-the-play—all these, as well as many more minor conventionalities, such as the swearing on the sword-hilt, or the voice of the ghost in the cellar, had appeared in other plays than the old 'Hamlet.'"

Here once more we find Shakspere engaged in doing exactly what his immediate predecessors had done, but doing it with a difference which divides his work from theirs by an impassable gulf. While the other dramas in which these devices were utilized are now forgotten, or at least known only to devoted specialists in theatrical history, 'Hamlet' is alive to-day in the theater and in the library, as potent in its appeal to the crowd, to the women and to thinkers as when it first delighted the gallants seated on the sides of the stage and the groundlings standing in the unroofed yard of the Globe. What the feebler playwrights had been vainly endeavoring to accomplish, Shakspere achieved with easy certainty. He fused the elements they had provided, and out of them he built a monument more enduring than bronze. The artifices they had employed, each for its own sake, he made accessory to the portrayal of Hamlet himself. Even if his imagination had been fed by their inventions, he rose without effort to an originality all his own.

When we consider 'Hamlet' in its relation to these other plays, much of the obscurity which many critics have discovered in it vanishes at once. Professor Lounsbury was as wise as he was witty when he suggested that some commentators resemble fog-horns, in that they declare the existence of the fog, but do nothing to dispel it; and we

might go further and assert that often the mist in which they find themselves enveloped is of their own distillation. There is little enough obscurity in Hamlet when we see him on the stage; and there need be no more when we consider him in the study. Dreamer as he is, he has a will of his own; he knows what he wants to do, even if he is at times in doubt how to do it. He loved his father profoundly, and he was naturally outraged by his mother's indecent haste in her wedding with his uncle. Then the Ghost tells him that his uncle murdered his father. But can he believe the Ghost? Is this messenger from the other world a spirit of health or a goblin damned? Hamlet must be sure; and yet he may not be able always to control himself at will. So he instantly warns his friends that he may see fit to put "an antic disposition on"—that is, to pretend insanity, a frequent device in other revenge-plays when the avenger needed time to mature his vengeance. And it is the senile Polonius who first declares that Hamlet is really mad, and mad from love. That this discovery is made by an old dodderer is proof that Shakspere does not mean us to believe it; and here again we are helped by Molière, who wished us to know Tartuffe for a villain before we lay eyes on him, and who therefore had Tartuffe's hypocrisy suspected by all the wise characters, while his piety is praised by all the foolish characters.

After the performance of the play-within-the-play, at which Claudius reveals his guilt, Hamlet is sure that the Ghost has told the truth; he knows that Claudius is guilty; but Claudius now suspects that he knows this. Hamlet is fixt in his resolve to have his uncle's life in return for his father's. Yet he will not seize the chance occasion and despatch the villain at his prayers, for the murderer must meet the fate of the murdered man and die with all

his sins on him. Furthermore, it will not suffice merely to kill the King; and some means must be found to expose the guilt of Claudius and to make his death not a mere assassination but a righteous execution. Hamlet does not see his way clear to this; and he has to bide his time, implacable as is his determination. He is able to thwart the suspicious King's scheme to have him assassinated in England; and then, before he has decided how to get out of the dilemma, the fencing match with the fatal foils is arranged. Thereafter the action rushes on tumultuously to its bloody end.

It was a saying of Amiel's that "thought without action is an evil, and so is action without thought." Hamlet is a deep thinker who is capable of prompt action when once he has decided what is best to do. That he is always interesting on the stage itself is proof positive that he is not weak of will, since spectators soon lose interest in a character who does not know his own mind. It is true that Coleridge called Hamlet brave and careless of death, but vacillating from sensibility and procrastinating from thought, thus losing "the power of action in the energy of resolve." But though Hamlet has to procrastinate at times, he never loses the power of action, and even his slight procrastination appears to be due to the mesh of dread circumstance in which he is entangled. Nor does he vacillate from sensibility; even if he possesses this, he is not possessed by it. He is not unduly self-conscious, comprehensible as that would be in his strange situation. He is ironic rather than sentimental. He may dally with the suggestion of suicide, but he puts it by. Suicide would be too cowardly a solution for a brave man, careless of death. That Hamlet does not slink out of the duty laid upon him, even if he is compelled to postpone its execution,

may be taken as evidence that he was not a sentimentalist at bottom—or even a cynic, who is often only a sentimentalist turned sour. A sentimentalist is never terrible; and Hamlet stands forth at last as a towering tragic figure.

He is not a sentimentalist and he is not a madman. His insanity is deliberately assumed for a definite purpose, as a cloak to enable him to bide his time. His madness has a method in it, disclosed plainly enough by his appearance before Ophelia, who does not know what to make of his abnormal behavior. Some commentators have accepted his insanity as feigned at first and as genuine toward the end. For this view there is little support in the play as we have it. Hamlet is of a melancholy temperament and he is strangely overwrought; but he keeps his senses and he never forgets his purpose, however he may veil it from others.

IV

'Hamlet' is a most successful acting play, and it is also a searching psychological document; but when he wrote it Shakspere had not yet attained his full growth, and it is not difficult to discover evidences of his comparative immaturity. That is to say, we can find in 'Hamlet' inadequacies which we fail to find in certain of his later plays. It is a masterpiece, no doubt, but it is not without blemish. Shakspere is writing a play to please his audiences and also to express himself; and he puts into it much that the mere playgoers cannot perceive and that discloses itself only to the reverent student. He also puts into it some things that are foreign to the action and not strictly relevant to the characters. Shakspere and his fellow-actors resented the rivalry of the children's companies;

and so we have a discussion wholly out of place in this play, distending it by sheer dialogue devoid of immediate significance. Quite as needless is Hamlet's protest against the Danish habit of drinking deep; this subserves no useful purpose either in emphasizing the atmosphere of the action or in elucidating the personality of any of the characters.

It must be noted also that at least two of the speeches of Polonius seem to be extraneous. The first is the long discourse of pregnant advice to his departing son, admirable in itself, and therefore likely to be relished by Elizabethan audiences, but not strictly in keeping with the senile garrulity of Polonius himself. And the other is the wholly superfluous episode in which Polonius instructs Reynaldo how to make inquiry in Paris as to the behavior of Laertes. Here again Polonius shows a shrewdness of speech not exhibited by him in the other scenes in which he is more intimately related to the action of the play.

More noteworthy than these excrescences is what can only be called callousness. Hamlet's dealing with the body of Polonius is indefensible; it is frankly unfeeling; it is wholly unworthy of the gentle prince as we see him in other moods. Nor is it easy to defend his attitude toward Ophelia and his unkind disregard of the suffering he needlessly inflicts upon her. Still less explicable is the treatment of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. They have spied upon him, it is true, and they are bearers of a sealed missive which is to be his sentence of death. But they are not accessories before the fact; they are only obeying Claudius in all innocence. Yet Hamlet substitutes for their letter of instructions one of his own in which he sends them to certain death. This is wanton murder; it is unnecessary to his purpose or for his own protection, and it is quite foreign to his character as a whole.

In like manner Laertes, who is presented as a manly young fellow with no paraded vices, falls in at once with the proposal of Claudius to assassinate Hamlet with an unbuttoned foil; and he even volunteers immediately to perform a more dastardly trick of his own—to put poison on the blade. It might be possible to defend this as the swift condensation of stage necessity when the final act of a play is rushing precipitately to its culmination; but it is more likely to be only an example of the summary psychology common enough in Kyd before Shakspere and in Beaumont and Fletcher after him. The Elizabethan playgoers delighted in frequent transformations of character, however contradictory these might be in themselves.

No doubt these blemishes are but trifles, after all, which the spectator does not notice and which do not arrest for long the attention of the reader. The play is what it is, in spite of the flaws which may be picked in it. More than one of the minor characters is only brushed in, a mere figure in profile, lacking the rotundity of real life. Inconsistencies there are even in the conduct of the plot; and there are episodes which stand in need of explanation. The most natural method of accounting for these sins of omission and commission is to assume that Shakspere begins by taking the old play and by refashioning it here and there—perhaps doing no more at first than the rewriting of certain speeches and the remaking of scenes. Then, in time, as he becomes more interested in the personality of Hamlet, he recasts that character and modifies the conduct of the action to conform to his subtler conception of its hero. Going at it piecemeal, he may never have completed it to his own satisfaction. At least, we cannot be assured that we have his final text as he would have wished us to have it—if he could have foreseen that

we should care for it three centuries after Burbage had used it to fill the Globe time after time. What we need always to remember is that Shakspere is embroidering his new pattern on an old canvas; and we have no reason to be puzzled if we catch a glimpse now and again of the worn stuff under the fresh work.

V

Shakspere is never a theorist of the drama, but always a practical playwright, accepting the conditions of the theater as he found it, with no desire to innovate. He always declines to put on the gyves of "poetic justice" as that doctrine has been narrowly defined, just as he also refuses to enter the triple-barred cage of the so-called unities of Action, of Time and of Place. His tragic heroes do not survive their vain struggle against forces which they cannot overcome; and when they finally pull down the twin pillars of the temple, they are crushed in the ruin they have wrought. Yet at the end of Shakspere's greater tragedies there is reconciliation and peace. Though the individual has perished, the state survives; and it is left in a sounder condition than before the action began. Hamlet and Laertes, the King and the Queen, may lie dead before our eyes; but there, standing in sight, is the stalwart figure of young Fortinbras ready to take up the reins of government. So Romeo and Juliet had died untimely in the tomb; but their deaths had brought about the cessation of the fatal feud and bestowed upon Verona the boon of an unhoped-for cessation of strife. Shakspere is too large a genius and he has too searching an insight ever to falsify his report by pretending that his ill-starred heroes need not pay the penalty imposed on them.

He could rest his fame as a psychologist upon the single character of Hamlet. Other characters in other and later plays attest the wide range of his knowledge of mankind, but none of them better than Hamlet discloses the depth of his penetration. In no one of his plays does Shakspere probe the recesses of the soul with a subtler certainty than in this; and yet the atmosphere of the play is healthy and not pathologic. Hamlet himself is not morbid, even though he may be sadly sick at heart; and he is not abnormal, even though he is sternly forced out of the regular current of daily life. He stands before us a man, such as we are; of a finer grain, no doubt, and of a more exquisite sensibility, but one of us, after all—a man, and not a monster, a man to whom we are drawn irresistibly because of his full share of our common humanity, a man with whom we can sympathize and in whom we can see ourselves.

As 'Hamlet' is evidence of Shakspere's right to be reckoned with as a psychologist, so it also justifies his title to be considered as a philosopher. The play as a whole is informed and sustained by a sound understanding of the complexities of existence, an understanding possible only to a poet with a large apprehension of life. The philosophy of Shakspere underlies the action from beginning to end; it endows this action with large significance; and it gives the play sincerity, sanity and integrity. The drama is swathed in philosophy, and the character of Hamlet is that of a man prone to philosophize. The strange situations in which the young prince is suddenly involved tempt him to frequent disquisition. His attention is keenly aroused by certain of the problems of life; and his alert curiosity makes him turn them over in his mind.

Of course, Shakspere discussing these questions, through the mouth of Hamlet, does not pretend to proffer any solution or even to push the investigation further than it had been carried earlier. It is the privilege of the dramatic poet to put problems before us, but it is never his duty to solve them. He is not required to be ready with an answer to any of the riddles of the universe, however much these may perplex his several characters. His duty is to set his characters before us, making each of them obey the law of its own being and express the thoughts awakened by the situation. It need surprise no one that there is little originality in Hamlet's musings over the lure of self-slaughter, for instance. Shakspere is not making a contribution to mental science; and what Hamlet says must have been said by scores of fellow-sufferers in the centuries before Shakspere was born. There is no more novelty in the "To be or not to be" soliloquy than there is in the "Call no man happy till he be dead" at the end of 'Œdipus the King.'

Shakspere is like Sophocles in that he was not an original thinker, in the narrow sense of the term. Dramatic poets are not called upon to push forward the boundaries of intellectual speculation. Playwrights must ever appeal to the people as a whole, and therefore they cannot adventure themselves too far in advance of the majority. The maker of plays can be an original thinker only in the broader sense that his thoughts are his own even if they may have been slaves to thousands. However worn and aged these thoughts may be in themselves, they are fresh and young to him, for they have been born to him anew out of his own travail. The poet can take the old coins, smoothed with the years, and issue them from his mint unsullied by earlier contacts. The eternal verities are all

essential commonplaces which the poets of every generation are free to voice again in imperishable phrase. The dramatic poet, more particularly, can make old truths new by the sheer sincerity of his own belief in them. Thus he brings them home to the spectator, compelled for once to take cognizance of them in the theater, even if he might have made acquaintance with them earlier elsewhere.

Thus it is the poet who is the constant collaborator of the philosopher. Poet as he is, Shakspere is ever the theater-poet (to use Goethe's term). His lines are attuned to the rhythm of the spoken word. They have the flowing amplitude which the actor needs and desires; they re fitted for oral delivery; and they fall trippingly on the ear. In 'Hamlet' rime is eschewed almost altogether (recurring only in an occasional exit-speech), perhaps because the play has little of that purely lyric emotion which almost cries aloud for the echoes of the couplet. So, also, there are few of the merely verbal conceits common enough in the plays of his 'prentice period when he had not yet discovered how much he had to say. The lines are no longer prevailingly end-stopped, although the verse is still cautiously wrought. It is at once fluid and sonorous, grateful to the actor and effective upon the hearer. Yet it does not quite attain the large freedom which Shakspere was soon to achieve in 'Othello' and 'Macbeth.'

Already in 'Romeo and Juliet' had he exemplified his possession of "that intense fire," as Professor Lounsbury has called it, "that passion which fuses thought and feeling into felicity of expression, which is the envy and despair of the imitator." His style is less conscious than Vergil's or Milton's or even Dante's; it is less deliberate.

We rarely feel tempted to wonder whether he did not roll the phrase on his tongue from an almost sensual delight in the dexterity of his art. In his noblest passages there is an affluence and a freedom seemingly as unpremeditated as in Homer's undecorated lines. And beautiful as his best speeches are in the study, it is only on the stage that they achieve their full effect.

CHAPTER XII

THE COMEDY-DRAMAS

I

SHAKSPERE was in no sense precocious, fortunately for him; as Margaret Fuller once said, "for precocity some great price is always demanded sooner or later in life." He had begun modestly by revising and by imitating; and only as he advanced in technical dexterity had he clearly discerned where his real strength lay. He had come to the drama when it was in a period of marvelous expansion and when it had not arrived at any general recognition either of its possibilities or of the best method for their attainment.

It was a little unlucky for Shakspere himself—and it was very unlucky for the dramatists who had to follow him—that he arrived upon the scene before definite types of tragedy and of comedy had been established. There is advantage for every author in finding a fit formula ready to his hand, since he is then free to express himself as best he can in accord with a pattern which has already won acceptance. Sophocles, for example, took over the framework of Æschylus as Racine accepted that of Corneille; they both modified the tradition they derived from these immediate predecessors, but by it they were relieved from tentative vagueness of effort. Shakspere was not aided by any satisfactory tradition which he could receive unhesitatingly. He had to blaze his own trail; and it is no wonder that he sometimes wandered in a circle. As Hux-

ley says, it is when a man can do as he pleases that his troubles begin. In many of Shakspere's earlier plays we can discover evidences of his groping darkly for a pattern fitted for his immediate purpose.

Yet he had already finished his apprenticeship. A poet he was by the gift of God; a psychologist he became by observation and by intuition; a philosopher he had risen to be as the result of insight and of meditation; and a playwright he had made himself by hard work, by the absorption of every available trick of the trade which his predecessors and contemporaries had devised, and also by constant and adroit experimenting of his own. He had proved his mastery by tragedies as different as 'Romeo and Juliet' and 'Hamlet.' It is strange, therefore, that he should ever have written three plays as comparatively empty of dramatic power as 'All's Well that Ends Well,' 'Measure for Measure' and 'Troilus and Cressida.' It is still stranger that he should have written these plays at this period of his development as a dramatist. They contain single scenes that only Shakspere could have handled and occasional passages that only he could have phrased; but none the less are they among his poorest productions. And the critic who does not feel keenly the inferiority of these three pieces is disqualified for a full appreciation of the immense superiority of 'Hamlet' and 'Romeo and Juliet,' of the 'Merchant of Venice' and 'As you Like it.'

In considering no other group of his pieces is the lack of an ascertained chronology more annoying than in dealing with these somber plays, two of them comedy-dramas and the third a bitter and ribald satire devoid of the gaiety of true comedy. All the evidence tends to prove that these three pieces were composed in the same brief space of years in which he was also composing 'Julius

Cæsar' and 'Hamlet,' 'Othello' and 'Macbeth.' Now these are well-made plays on worthy themes, and they certify to Shakspere's attainment of a high degree of technical dexterity. Why then should he have at this time written three pieces, 'All's Well,' 'Measure for Measure' and 'Troilus and Cressida,' ill made on unworthy themes, carelessly thrown together and repugnant in temper?

The current explanation is that these were hurried work, thrown off hastily while his mind was focused on the more important and more interesting plays which he was producing in the same period. That Shakspere often worked under pressure is very likely, since he had a hand in nearly forty pieces in about twenty years, from 1591 to 1611, from his twenty-seventh year to his forty-seventh. This averages about two plays a year; and haste might account, more or less, for the slovenliness of the plot-making in these three pieces, since structural symmetry can be achieved only by taking thought.

But haste alone is an inadequate explanation for the artistic lapses of these plays. It does not supply any justification for the themes themselves or for the harsh tone which characterizes them. It does not account for the almost wilful violation of those dominating principles of the drama which ought to have become almost second nature to Shakspere at this time and by which he was being guided in the composition of 'Hamlet' and 'Othello.' And yet haste on the one side and on the other his absorption in more interesting work are the only excuses that have been urged for the reckless composition of these plays, while their unlovely atmosphere has been credited, more or less fancifully, to some personal experience of his own at about that time. This last suggestion may have a

certain weight, although it is not borne out by the facts of literary biography, which tend to show that many of the most humorous books have flowered out of their authors' melancholy in periods of depression. Perhaps there is more validity in the explanation which calls attention to the popularity of what may be termed sex-problem plays by Middleton and Marston in the half dozen years after 1600, the very period when Shakspere, always keenly responsive to the influence of the contemporary theater, was composing these comedy-dramas. Whatever the reason may be, the fact remains that Shakspere did descend to the writing of these three dramatically inferior pieces in the same years that he was composing his noblest plays.

II

'All's Well that Ends Well' is the feeblest of the lot, dramaturgically and psychologically. Of all the plays which are indisputably Shakspere's own, it is the weakest. The story is offensive; the plotting is casual; the character-drawing is unconvincing and inconsistent; and the humor is inexpensive. The method throughout is immature, as if in sympathy with the puerility of the subject. The story which he borrowed from Boccaccio is absurd and unpleasant. At bottom it may not be more medieval than that of the 'Merchant of Venice,' but it is less capable of effective dramatic development. And while the story of the 'Merchant of Venice' may be impossible when tested by the facts of life, it is sweet and pleasant, whereas the story of 'All's Well,' perhaps not absolutely impossible in itself, is odious and offensive. The story of the 'Merchant of Venice' Shakspere builds up into a com-

pact plot, rising scene by scene to its climax and declining at last in a lovely vision of young love delighting in its triumph; but the story of 'All's Well' he leaves a straggling sequence of episodes of mere narrative baldly presented in dialogue. Probably the theme could not have been made dramatically attractive; and certainly Shakspere does not make it either attractive or dramatic.

Apparently it was Shakspere's ingrained belief (founded it may be on his own experience) that woman is not only willing to meet her wooer half-way, as Juliet and Rosalind do, but often to make advances, as Olivia and Phœbe and Desdemona do—and also the Venus of 'Venus and Adonis.' This belief is pushed to its uttermost extreme in 'All's Well,' where we see Helena forcing the unwilling Bertram into a distasteful marriage and then winning him by the most despicable of tricks, a device as indelicate as it is crude. That the heroine is capable of descending to such a low contrivance, with all that it implies, robs her at once of any claim to sympathy. And in the desire to force the contrast between her and the man she takes captive, Shakspere persistently blackens him and makes him so contemptible a creature that she degrades herself in our eyes almost as much by the mere fact that she pursues such a cad as by the abhorrent contrivance which makes him hers at last. We do not even pity her in her success; rather do we despise them both.

The situation in which the original tale forces her to place herself is, as Andrew Lang put it sharply, "at once hideous and wholly out of keeping with Helena's character as it appears in her conversations" with Bertram's mother. But it is not out of keeping with her earlier conversation with Parolles in which she bandies words about her own virginity—a conversation reeking with vulgarity and

quite impossible to a modest-minded girl, however frank and plain-spoken she might be. Almost as degrading are the speeches in which she challenges one lord after another to marry her before she unexpectedly claims the unsuspecting Bertram, a scene needless in itself, and needlessly gross, made worse by the vulgar comments of La Feu. Henry James once asserted that George Sand had no taste morally; only very rarely could a similar accusation be brought against Shakspere; but here, in these two scenes, is evidence that he was not unwilling to descend to tickle the groundlings of the Globe with the quibbling indecency they avidly relished. Shakspere's great plays are for all time; but 'All's Well' and its fellows are only for Tudor days.

Shakspere has padded out the main narrative with irrelevant humor. The theme itself did not suggest or call for comic characters; and these which Shakspere has inserted remain extraneous to the central story. He returns to the "clown," that is, to the low comedian sent on the stage at intervals merely to be funny without the aid of an assumed character. In 'All's Well' this low-comedy part is actually nameless; in the First Folio he is frankly designated as the "clown." This clown has conversations with the Countess and with La Feu empty of significance but bristling with verbal quibbles and often with obscene innuendo. These dialogues are lacking in any flavor of character; they are on the level of the "sidewalk conversations" of our modern variety-shows. Andrew Lang was not overstating the case when he calls the frivolities of the clown "coarse and stupid, even beyond the ordinary stupidity of Elizabethan horse-play."

Although the clown is the least comic of all alleged comic characters, the other figures supposed to be amus-

ing are only a little more truthful. The old lord, La Feu (intended obviously for the actor who had played Polonius and who was to play Pandarus), is a traditional type, frequent in other Elizabethan pieces and not here sharply individualized. The cowardly soldier, Parolles (designed probably for the performer of Sir Andrew Aguecheek), is only a variant of the braggart, which English comedy had taken over from the Greek and the Latin, the Italian and the French. He is a diminished replica of Falstaff done without gusto or unction. The episodes in which he appears lack spontaneity; they suggest fatigue of invention; and such humor as they have is largely mechanical and often perfunctory. The protracted scene in which Parolles is convicted of cowardice has flashes of fun now and again, but it is only an example of that most primitive form of humor, the practical joke.

Deficient as 'All's Well' is in dramatic vigor and in psychologic veracity, it is deficient also in poetry. Passages there are in which we find the true Shaksperian fire; but there are only a few of them. Even in style, which rarely forsakes Shakspere, we find a sad falling-off. There are long speeches and dialogues in rime, stuffed with classical allusions, even when the situation cries aloud for the large simplicity of blank verse. Helena's letter is in sonnet form; and her final soliloquy is in rime, as though the arbitrariness of the theme compelled artificiality of treatment. There is an unreality of thought and a stiff mannerism of expression far removed from the noble felicity of the speeches in 'Hamlet.' In fact, if we knew Shakspere only as the author of 'All's Well' we should rank him with the outer throng of his contemporaries, and not higher than the average of those whose works have survived.

It may be that when he composed 'All's Well' he was worn and weary, distracted by some personal suffering we can only guess at. Yet it needs to be said once more that his effort seems always to be in direct proportion to the attraction exerted upon him by the subject he is at work on. When his theme is inspiring he puts forth all his power, and stands revealed as the accomplished playwright and the incomparable poet. But he is often casual in the selection of his subject, taking whatever trifling tale chances to be nearest to his hand and descending to stories wholly unworthy of his genius. Then his ambition is not roused and his endeavor is relaxed; he moves along the line of least resistance, and he is concerned chiefly to supply the groundlings with what they will enjoy.

III

Fortunately for us, it was not often that he let himself sink to this low level; and 'Measure for Measure,' open as it is to much of the same adverse criticism which has been here bestowed upon 'All's Well,' is distinctly a better piece of work. Its theme is repugnant, but it is not uninteresting. The most conscientious of playwrights could not make a really good play on the subject of 'All's Well,' whereas it is possible that the subject of 'Measure for Measure' might be worked up into a fairly coherent plot, even if Shakspere himself fails to do this. Even as he treats the theme there are at least three scenes of genuine dramatic value, which he handles with secure mastery. These are, first, the discovery by Angelo that he lusts after Isabella; then the scene in which he proposes his evil bargain to her; and finally the scene in which she tells her brother of the fearful price she would have to pay for his

life, and in which Claudio's courage deliquesces in the imminent fear of death. These episodes are rendered with Shakspere's customary power; they are rich in poetry and in psychology; they grip the interest of the spectator with unfailing authority. But the story as a whole is haphazard in its movement; it again is only a narrative cut into dialogues, and not compactly built up into a logical structure, rising scene by scene to its climax. Shakspere's method is here no better than that of the writers of the chronicle-plays who held the stage when he first came up to London; and this method called for the inclusion of needless episodes of mere buffoonery. The play is as medieval in manner as it is in substance.

The theme is not so obnoxious as that of 'All's Well,' and it has dramatic possibilities, even if Shakspere neglected to make the most of them. It demands that nocturnal substitution of one woman for another, which Shakspere had already used in 'All's Well,' and which the elder Dumas was to employ in 'Mlle. de Belle-Isle.' This unseemly device is not quite so forced in 'Measure for Measure' as it is in 'All's Well,' since the volunteering of Mariana of the later play may have a justification wholly lacking to the Diana of the earlier play. But the artifice itself is unlovely, and it cannot be made acceptable. In employing it Shakspere is invading the territory of Beaumont and Fletcher, to whom it seems more naturally to belong.

There may be much of the same make-believe in the 'Merchant of Venice,' but there at least the characters are alive; Shylock rings true, Portia and Jessica and Nerissa are human and womanly and feminine, whereas in 'Measure for Measure' all the characters are more or less wooden. Even Isabella is open to this criticism at times;

her appeal to the Duke in the last act is eloquent, but not heartfelt; it is essentially rhetorical at a moment when rhetoric is out of place. The rest of the persons in the piece are little better than puppets. Claudio is the best of them, although he is only sketched in. Angelo admits that he is a sensualist, but he displays rather the chilly viciousness of the stage-villain than the hot ardor of a truly passionate nature. The Duke is absurd in his solemn disguises, put on and put off, for purely theatrical effect. The scenes which follow the Duke's return are merely plot for the sake of plot itself; they evince a Scribe-like complexity without Scribe's ingenuity. Mr. A. B. Walkley was uttering the opinion of every honest critic when he declared that "we do not like these people, and we do not like many of the sentiments by which they are governed."

The comic characters are not quite so dreary as those in 'All's Well.' Lucio (obviously composed for the actor who had played Mercutio and Gratiano) has a flippant briskness which is at least less wearisome than the dull fooling of the clown. Mrs. Overdone (obviously impersonated by the performer of Mrs. Quickly and of the Nurse in 'Romeo and Juliet') is set before us with full appreciation of her type. Escalus (possibly undertaken by Shakspere himself) has a dignified simplicity. Elbow is plainly a replica of Dogberry (and was certainly intended for the same actor, probably Armin). But Elbow lacks the spontaneity of Dogberry; his garrulity is tedious, and he has the ineffectiveness which is likely to be the result of any mechanical attempt to repeat an earlier hit. As a group the avowedly comic characters contribute very little to the gaiety of nations.

Whatever appeal the play may have is due wholly to

Isabella; and she is not quite equal to the burden laid on her shoulders. She does not rise to the possible heights of the situation; she is a little deficient both in feeling and in intelligence. That, resolved as she was to enter a nunnery, she should pair off with the Duke at the end of the play, so that the so-called comedy may end with three weddings, leaves her in our memory as a figure sadly diminished from the heroic. The Duke has not wooed her, and apparently he has never given her a thought as a possible consort. She has shown no liking for him; and yet she accepts him offhand, practically selling herself for rank, although she had refused to sell herself to save her brother's life. This is all of a piece with the huddled confusion of the final act and with the topsyturvy morality which underlies its conclusion. Even the villain Angelo is spared and dismissed to matrimony—a matrimony which has slight promise of bliss for the injured Mariana; but as Mariana also is devoid of interest, this matters little.

The play has many fine lines—passages such as only Shakspere could pen. It contains certain of his most significant ethical judgments on sin and mercy and death. But it is as painful as it is ill-shapen; and at the core of it is a distasteful device. What lingers in the memory after its performance is the figure of Isabella, nobly conceived, even if inconsistently presented. And it is due solely to the histrionic opportunities of the part of Isabella that the piece is still seen at rare intervals on the stage, from which 'All's Well' and 'Troilus and Cressida' have long been banished. Even when it now emerges before the footlights its stay is but brief, for it gives the playgoer neither the purging pleasure of true tragedy nor the sparkling joy of genuine comedy. "It is a comedy

where Death holds the place of Love," so Andrew Lang declared; "there is no beautiful shape of Love in the whole of it, and the very mirth is miserable."

IV

If it is difficult to explain why Shakspere happened to write these two tragi-comedies, it is impossible to understand his reason for writing the third. 'Troilus and Cressida' is frankly the most obscure and the most baffling of all his pieces. His purpose in composing it is inexplicable; and we cannot even declare with certainty whether he meant to make it tragic or comic. It has no central theme; and the three strands of story which are intertwined are left at loose ends. It is entitled 'Troilus and Cressida,' and yet Cressida appears only four times in all: once to deny herself to Troilus and then eagerly to accept his unlawful love without any explanation of her change of attitude; next she parts sorrowfully from Troilus; and when we last see her she is dallying with Diomed, to whom she is about to surrender herself in mere wantonness.

In more than half of the piece the love story is allowed to drop out of sight, while we are distracted by a gallimaufry of debates and battles. The play is a patchwork of amorous intrigues, of wrangling oratory and of gladiatorial combats; the final battle scene is puerile, not to call it infantile, and it belongs to a very primitive period of dramatic art. The play is an incoherent and fragmentary jumble, with no unity of action, no continuity of interest, no dominating figure on which we may center our attention. Uninteresting as a whole, it is infrequently interesting in any of its episodes. Dramaturgically it is

the least successful of all the plays accredited to Shakspere; and this is the reason why it long ago vanished from the stage. It lacks even the impelling self-will which lent a certain sort of interest to the pursuit of Bertram by Helena. The deficiency of action and the absence of motive combine to make the drama dull in any actual performance.

That the story should have been thrown together loosely in this helter-skelter fashion supplies us a reason for doubting whether Shakspere was here availing himself of the earlier piece on the same subject, which we know to have existed. He seems to have drawn his material direct from a medieval tale about Troy, one form of which had been vigorously Englished by Caxton, while another had been utilized earlier by Chaucer. But from Chaucer Shakspere takes over at most the character of Pandarus, while in Chapman's translation of Homer he finds only the suggestion of the character of Thersites. The major part of his story, in so far as the piece can be said to have any story, he borrows from Caxton's translation, as he was to borrow the major part of the stories of 'Julius Cæsar' and 'Antony and Cleopatra' from North's translation of Plutarch. But in deriving matter from Plutarch he was to go to a worthy source, and he heightened what he drew from it, whereas in going to Caxton he is drawing from a defiled spring, and he debases what he derives from it. In the plays taken from Plutarch he is superior to his material, fine as that is; and in the play taken from Caxton he is inferior to his material, tawdry as that is.

Puzzling as is Shakspere's dramaturgic feebleness here, even more puzzling is his desire to debase the heroic figures he dimly glimpsed. He has no mercy on any of the

stalwart warriors of Greece; and he pitilessly exposes them to corroding ridicule. To him all these heroes are fundamentally unheroic. To him Achilles and Agamemnon and Ajax are a lot of dull brutes and boastful cowards. He seizes upon every possible pettiness and sets it in the forefront. He puts them under the microscope of his disintegrating irony and dissects them with a merciless scalpel. In this assault upon consecrated renown Shakspere goes far beyond the mild iconoclasm of Bernard Shaw in his 'Cæsar and Cleopatra.' He almost anticipates the opera-bouffe derision of the 'Belle Hélène' of Meilhac and Halévy, a derision redeemed by humorous sympathy. Shakspere's Achilles is not far removed from the *bouillant Achille* of the two clever French wits and his Agamemnon is not unlike their *mari de la reine*. Why Shakspere, who has so noble an appreciation of the loftily heroic, descends thus to cheapen the heroes of Homer must remain an unsolvable enigma.

It might be suggested that he prepares the play specially for the actors, providing them with an endless succession of sonorous speeches, often weighty with wisdom and often instinct with poetry, that he is giving his fellow-performers a chance to take part in a prize debate, each in his turn having occasion to spout loud-sounding oratory, "speeches that you can sink your teeth in" (to employ the apt phrase of the old-school actor in Pinero's play). But this suggestion, alluring as it may be at first glance, does not approve itself on further consideration. If this is Shakspere's intent, he plainly overreaches himself, since the speechmaking is so excessive that it must have been fatiguing even to the Elizabethan audiences, greedy as they were for grandiloquent rhetoric. And after all is said, a debate, or a sequence of debates, can

never be acceptable as a substitute for a drama; and no one would discover this more swiftly than the actors who took part in the long-drawn discussions.

Although the play is without any possible popularity on the stage, it is not without qualities which demand consideration in the study. It is unworthy of Shakspere as a playwright, but it sometimes heightens our opinion of him as a poet and as a philosopher. Even more does it disclose his power as a psychologist. He has here given us a group of unheroic and unlovely characters, marvelously etched, bitten into the plate by the acid of his satire. Never in any of his plays did he create a character more evil-mouthed than Thersites, and hardly ever did he create a character more consistent and more convincing. Thersites is incessant in railing; he is full of all manner of uncharitableness, boiling over with envy, hatred and malice; he is a common scold whose tongue is against every man; he is mean and malignant, voiding his venom on humanity at large. This vituperative and vitriolic personality is alive in every utterance, with an appalling vitality; and his temper is a forerunner of that which we find more than once in Swift, whom Shakspere here anticipates, as he anticipated so many other of the authors who were to come after him.

V

With these three pieces Shakspere bids farewell to comedy, for the 'Tempest' can be called a comedy only by granting a large inclusiveness to the word. If the approximate date which is generally given to 'Troilus and Cressida' is fairly exact, then that is the last of the plays in which there is any large proportion of wit and humor.

Evidently thereafter the comic aspects of life were less inspiring to him. His mind was engaged with larger and graver themes. In no one of his later plays, various as they are in substance and in style, have we anything which recalls the juicy humor of Falstaff; and we have very little which reminds us of the joyous gaiety of Rosalind and Beatrice. Now and again, in an occasional episode and in a casual character, we may catch a glimpse of the exuberance which charmed us in the earlier romantic-comedies; but the tone of the later plays is almost unfailingly serious. Even if there is sporadic humor here and there, it is generally employed only as a temporary relief for the stress of tragic emotion. Such, for example, is the brief appearance of the Porter in 'Macbeth.' Not a few of Shakspere's later plays are almost without lighter passages.

The three incongruous pieces which have been discussed in this chapter are not true comedies; they may be called comedy-dramas or tragi-comedies; but in fact they belong to a group for which we have no satisfactory name. In Shakspere's works they are usually classed with his comedies, perhaps mainly because they could not fairly be classed either with the tragedies or with the histories. Assuredly they are far from being comic in their intent or in their effect. They move us to sadness rather than to mirth. They are evidence that Shakspere, who had already attained to true tragedy, had not found the formula for comedy. And a perfectly adequate and completely satisfactory formula for comedy he never did attain, however much he may have delighted us with humorous dramas in which he discloses his keen insight into the pettinesses and the frivolities of humanity. There is an exalted type of comedy corresponding to an exalted

type of tragedy, a lively play of contemporary life and manners which conforms to Cicero's definition; it is "an imitation of life, a mirror of custom, an image of truth"; and it approximates to Ben Jonson's comment on Cicero's phrase in that it is "a thing throughout pleasant and ridiculous, and accommodated to the correction of manners." It may have been achieved by Menander, although this is not very likely. It was certainly attained by Molière, perhaps most successfully in the 'Femmes Savantes'; and the comic dramatists who have come after Molière found his formula ready to their hands—Congreve in the 'Way of the World,' Sheridan in the 'School for Scandal,' Beaumarchais in the 'Barber of Seville,' Augier and Sandeau in the 'Gendre de M. Poirier.' This was a formula that Shakspere could not foresee and that the condition of the drama in England and in his time did not prompt him to discover for himself. He has left us farces of sundry kinds, sometimes almost lifted to the level of this high-comedy—if we may so call the type Molière perfected. He has made us his eternal debtors for the delight we have taken in his romantic-comedies, wherein the adventures of the more amusing characters are set in a framework of dark plotting and of Machiavellian machination. He saw fit later to compose the less worthy and less pleasant comedy-dramas considered in this chapter. But our gratitude for what he has done ought not to close our eyes to what he has not done; it must not make us blind to the fact that he did not write any play which belongs strictly to the purest type of high-comedy, the comedy uncontaminated by the arbitrariness of farce or by the stringency of drama.

It may sound like a paradox to say that comedy is more difficult than tragedy; but there would be at least a sug-

gestion of truth in the daring assertion. Comedy of any of the lower types is common enough and easy enough; but high-comedy, in the narrow meaning of the term, is very rare in all literatures, far rarer than tragedy. In Greece there is only the doubtful Menander to set over against Æschylus and Sophocles and Euripides; and in France there is only Molière to fellowship with Corneille and Racine. That success in one form of art is less frequent than success in another form of art may be taken as evidence that the former is at least more difficult than the latter. Perhaps because the highest type of comedy is more difficult, it has been able to develop itself only after tragedy is solidly established and has come to a consciousness of its methods. Menander, so it is believed, was deeply influenced by Euripides in the form as well as in the temper of his comedies; and Molière in his greater comedies had before his eyes the severe simplicity of Corneille.

Here perhaps is a hint for the explanation of Shakspere's inability to bestow upon his comedies the self-sufficient unity which he gave to his tragedies. By the time that Shakspere had been able to find for himself a fit formula for tragedy and to prove the value of this formula in 'Othello' and 'Macbeth,' he had already lost his interest in comedy and was ready to abandon it. There is matter for speculation whether Shakspere's best comedies might not have been composed upon a very different pattern if they had followed instead of preceding his best tragedies. Had this happened, there is at least a possibility that Shakspere might have anticipated Molière in discovering the true type of high-comedy, in accord with Cicero's definition.

CHAPTER XIII

'OTHELLO'

I

It is in 'Othello' that Shakspere first completely achieves the full richness of true tragedy to which he has risen at last. 'Romeo and Juliet,' beautiful as it is in spirit and in execution, is almost as lyric as it is tragic; and 'Hamlet' retains not a few characteristics of the tragedy-of-blood out of which it had been fashioned. 'Othello' is purely tragic, with scarcely any admixture of lyric and with no trace of the revenge-play. It recalls Gray's remark about an old ballad, in that "Aristotle's best rules are observed in it in a manner that shows the author had never heard of Aristotle." Probably, 'Othello' is the earliest of Shakspere's tragedies in which Aristotle, with his Greek open-mindedness, would have recognized a new departure of tragic art as worthy of analysis as the best that Sophocles had achieved. Its subject-matter, its warmth of passion, its elaboration of plot and its pictorial swiftness would have seemed strange to the Greek; and at first they might have been not a little disconcerting. But the acute Aristotle, although he might have been shocked by the killing of the heroine before the eyes of the spectators, would have discovered that his essential principles were exemplified, since 'Othello' conforms to the conditions prescribed by him. Although founded upon an Italian tale, 'Othello' is fundamentally English in its spirit and Elizabethan English

at that; and yet Aristotle could not fail to see that it has the stately massiveness of theme which ennobles the great Greek dramas.

Less vital as it may be, and less universal in its subject than 'Hamlet,' 'Othello' is technically superior; it is better built, with fewer divergencies and excrescences. Professor Thorndike has drawn attention to its relinquishment of current methods, in that "it is neither a chronicle-history nor a Senecan tragedy. There is no presentation of history and little of court ceremonies. There are no battles, no long exposition, no ghosts, no spectacles, no insanity, and almost no comedy. It has few persons and virtually a single action." Its movement never flags from the beginning to the end, except for a little space when the scene is suddenly shifted to Cyprus. But after the arrival of Othello at the island he is to rule until his death the onward progress is straightforward and irresistible. In mere form, in the skill of its structure, 'Othello' has no rival in all Shakspere's plays. The plotting may not be absolutely flawless, since, for one thing, the story moves so swiftly that there is actually no time allowed for any possible intrigue between Desdemona and Cassio, such as Iago gets Othello to accept. But the plot is wrought out with the loving care which Shakspere bestows upon a play only when its theme profoundly attracts him and when it impels him to put forth his full strength. Imagination was his as the gift of heaven, and insight into character also; but plot-making can be successful only as the result of taking thought; it depends upon a willingness to plan in advance with the utmost caution, so that the spectator shall accept instantly what passes before his eyes. It is the result rather of the humbler invention than of the loftier imagination. It is dependent upon an assidu-

ous attention to details which may seem trifles; but, as Michael Angelo put it pithily, "trifles make perfection, and perfection is not a trifle."

Shakspere had revealed his willingness to submit himself to this discipline in constructing the framework of an intricate plot as early as the 'Comedy of Errors,' but he did not always or often thus put himself out to display the dexterity of which he was capable. Even in 'Hamlet,' where he is supported by the plot devised by an earlier dramatist, he leaves a few loose threads. In 'Othello,' however, as in 'Romeo and Juliet' earlier, and in 'Macbeth' later—three plays in which the construction is wholly of his own contriving—he shows what he could do when he chose to exercise his ingenuity and when he was bent on doing his best. And in these three plays he reveals a mastery of all the tricks of the trade such as we can discover also in playwrights as different in aim as Scribe and Ibsen. Shakspere was here working purely as an artist in stagecraft, delighting in his labor, and therefore attaining an excellence far beyond the modest demands made upon the Tudor dramatist by the unsophisticated and easily pleased Elizabethan audiences.

'Othello' is almost perfect in its form; and it is only in the earlier scenes at Cyprus that the interest of the action is allowed to slacken even a little. Every episode is contrived to perform the triple function of helping on the catastrophe, of exhibiting character, and of being interesting in itself. The exposition is one of Shakspere's very best, than which there can be no higher praise. It is as clear, as lively, and as pictorial as the expositions of 'Romeo and Juliet,' of 'Hamlet' and of 'Macbeth.' The opening scene, at night when Iago notifies Brabantio of Othello's abduction of Desdemona, takes us at once into

the heart of the action. It leads instantly to the scene before the Duke wherein Othello justifies himself. And then Brabantio's final warning to Othello that Desdemona has deceived her father and may deceive her husband—this rounds out the opening act into a compact whole and hangs up the interrogation-mark of expectancy.

Nor is Shakspere, absorbed as he is in the creating of character and in the enmeshing of character in plot, forgetful of the few spectacular possibilities of his story. He bestows upon his play all the picturesque accessories of which the plot was capable. He gives us torches by night, a solemn sitting of the stately council, a suddenly raised riot under the silent stars and the loud clangor of the island bells. He keeps in mind the need of amusing the eyes and of delighting the ears of the groundlings who stood restless in the yard, while at the same time he was telling his story with a consummate artistry which even the university-bred gallants who sat upon the stage were not likely to appreciate fully.

II

The story he chooses to tell he found in an Italian tale of which there was a French translation. The English play out of which Shakspere made 'Hamlet' is lost, and we can only guess at its form and content; but the Italian tale out of which he made 'Othello' is extant. We can study his source for ourselves; and the result is illuminating. We can analyze the material which Shakspere found ready to his hand and we can observe the use to which he put it. In itself it is a good story that the Italian told, a story common enough in Renascence Italy and vulgar enough in its crude brutality. As we run

through it we may recall similar stories of marital revenge, reported in our yellower papers and set off with a needless luxury of scare-heads. It appears to lend itself most easily to a play little better than a raw melodrama, carried on by characters outlined in profile only, and existing only for the sake of the plot in which they are involved. It scarcely seems to contain the promise of a true tragedy in which the characters exist for themselves and in which the action is what it is only because the characters are what they are. We may even go farther and call the story painful in its episodes and in some measure even revolting. But these criticisms might be urged against the story of 'Hamlet' also, considered solely as a story, and even against the story of 'Œdipus the King.'

What Shakspere does is to take the narrative of the Italian writer and to put it back into solution, so to speak, that it might recrystallize in the form of drama and not narrative. He profits by the invention of Giraldi Cintio; but he does not feel himself in the least bound to follow the lines laid out by the novelist. The tale the Italian had told as a story Shakspere tells as a play, with all the modifications imposed by the change of form and with all the emendations compelled by his intention to raise a melodramatic narrative into a poetic tragedy. What was little better than a pathetic anecdote he enlarges and transfigures, partly by adroit and subtle changes in the conduct of the story, and partly, indeed mainly, by the addition of new characters to carry on the story as he has reconceived it and by transforming intellectually the characters provided for him by the Italian. These alterations and these additions are more abundant in 'Othello' than they were in 'Romeo and Juliet,' in which he was also reworking an Italian tale of amorous misfortune. In

'Othello,' as in 'Romeo and Juliet,' he is quick to take a hint, to create a character, or to build up a situation out of a casual suggestion in his source; and again he discloses his possession of the intuition and the instinct for theatrical effect, which is ever the birthright of the born playmaker. Shakspere has an instant apprehension of the scenes that must be shown in action.

The modifications he makes are so many that only the most significant can here be indicated. First of all, he hurries the languid action of the original tale, just as he had done earlier when he made 'Romeo and Juliet' out of Brooke's meandering poem. He compacts the plot mercilessly; he simplifies it; he makes it clear and direct; he intensifies it; and, above all, he elevates it and purifies it. He cuts out Iago's lust for Desdemona, and therefore he avoids a scene in which Iago might dare to disclose his unholy desire to Desdemona; apparently he felt that any suggestion of an amour with Iago was degrading to his delicate heroine. He refuses to let Iago help Othello in the killing of Desdemona; apparently he felt that this would vulgarize both hero and heroine. He rejects the idea that Othello would kill Desdemona out of mere revenge for the wrong she has done him, since Othello is too large for any pettiness of vengeance. He makes Othello smother Desdemona, instead of beating her to death with a stocking filled with sand. He cuts off the trailing conclusion of the Italian narrative and lets the action culminate in the suicide of Othello, after which nothing matters.

Shakspere adds the character of Desdemona's father, and thus supplies himself with the stuff out of which he was to weave his superbly effective opening scenes. He adds the character of Roderigo, and thus supplies Iago

with a pliant tool whom the wary schemer can employ, until at last the villain gets rid of his dupe by a careless assassination. He cleanses the character of Emilia, and deprives her of any suspicion as to the evil deeds and as to the true nature of her husband, thus bringing home to us the diabolical cleverness of Iago—clever enough even to deceive his own wife. He adds the ingenious episode of Cassio's allowing himself to be overtaken with liquor, an excellent invention, in that it sets before us Iago's Machiavellian ingenuity of intrigue, while it also rounds out the character of Cassio himself into an ampler humanity. Above all, Shakspere transforms the character of Othello. In the Italian tale the Moor is a barbarian and a violent brute; and in the English play he discloses himself as a true gentleman, courteous of speech, dignified in bearing, impressive in manner, not given to jealousy and slow to suspect. As Shakspere sets him before us, Othello has not only the elevation of a tragic hero, but also something large and elemental which belongs to himself; and of this there is nothing in the Italian tale.

As Professor Bradley points out, Othello is the most romantic of Shakspere's tragic heroes, more romantic even than Romeo, who borrows his romance rather from the circumstances of the story. Othello is romantic in himself, by his birth and by his career. He is a man of royal descent and of strange adventures, a wanderer in unknown regions, a warrior of valiant deeds. Of Oriental race, he has risen to honor amidst a European people by sheer force of character, by martial courage and by military skill. He is a man of large mold arrived at a sagacious maturity, not lyric like Romeo and not introspective like Hamlet, yet a poet in temper as well as in phrase. He is independent, yet trusting, eager for friendship and for

love. Romantic as he is in himself, he is tragic also; the atmosphere of the play is heavy with impending doom; and it is lightened only by an intermittent irony which brings out the poignancy of the tragedy.

III

It is the essence of the drama that it shall show the conflict of contending passions and that it shall set before us characters of indomitable will who know what they want and who bend every effort to get it. The mainspring of the plot of 'Othello' is Iago's implacable determination to destroy Cassio and to bring down Othello in the ruin he has wrought. It is Iago's will which works all the evil. Iago knows what he wants and he lets us know it; and we sit silent and breathless as we see the successive steps that he takes to attain his damnable object. He is the motive power of the mechanism, and he controls all the other persons in the play to achieve his fell purpose. He is the traditional stage-villain, the master of all stage-villains; and he is at the same time one of Shakspere's subtlest and most searching creations. He is a devil incarnate; and yet he is also an accusable human being. He is inhuman only that he has no touch of conscience, no doubt in himself, no hesitation in driving his dark and deadly scheme faster and faster to its full fruition. His blackness of soul is appalling; his wickedness passes belief; and yet as we see him going about his infernal business, we accept him not only as a possibility but as a fact. We may well doubt that such a fiend in human shape could exist; but when we behold him before us, all incredulity vanishes and we accept him for what he is. Abnormal he may be in the depth of his depravity, but alive he is

beyond all question. He is proud of his own intellect, and he despises the simpler folk he is overreaching. He has a boundless joy in his own superiority and a profound contempt for every one else.

In method of presentation Shakspere follows the primitive procedure of the Elizabethan platform-stage, when the actor was in closest proximity to the spectators—in fact, almost in personal contact with them. This proximity explains, even if it may not altogether justify, the confidential communications which the characters of the Tudor drama are in the habit of making to the spectators before them and around them. On the platform-stage of those distant days, so different from the picture-frame stage of our own time, the confidential soliloquy did not seem unnatural, even when the character went so far as to discuss his own villainy without the self-flattering subterfuges and self-deceiving ethical disguises which generally prevent even the worst of men from perceiving themselves as they appear to others. We know Iago for the villain he is because he confesses to us his own villainy, because he confides to us in advance his own hideous machinations.

Iago, it is true, does talk with some slight freedom to Roderigo, his witless dupe; but it is only to Roderigo, whom he despises and whom he holds not to be dangerous, that he lowers even for a moment the mask he wears before all the other persons in the play. But to the audience he is perfectly frank. The spectators he takes into his confidence from the first; and in soliloquy after soliloquy he tells them plainly what manner of man he is. The characters are deceived to their ultimate undoing; but the spectators are never for an instant in doubt as to Iago's baseness. The procedure of the playwright may be prim-

itive enough, but it is tremendously effective in the theater even to-day. Iago is intensely egotistic; he is so supremely interested in himself and so taken in by his own mental superiority that he has a boastful joy in self-revelation.

Yet even in these soliloquies in which Iago explains to the audience his dark intentions and in which he declares his several motives for hating Othello and Cassio, he does not succeed in making clear to us just what these motives are, or at least he does not convince us that these really are his motives and that they account adequately for his hellish animosity. He tells Roderigo that he hates Othello because Cassio has been promoted over his head; he tells the audience that he suspects Othello of an intrigue with Emilia; and later he tells the audience that he also suspects Cassio of an intrigue with Emilia. These two accusations against Emilia are not supported by anything in the play; and they are contradicted by all that we know about Emilia, who appears to us to be as devoted to her husband and as willing to do what he wishes as she is unsuspicious of his real nature. It may be doubted whether Iago himself really believes in the possibility of either of these intrigues with which he charges his wife, except that it was always easy for him to believe in evil. The suspicions seem to be put in his mouth by Shakspere to supply some sort of justification for his infernal scheme of revenge. As justifications they are unconvincing; and, in fact, no justification is really needful. Iago seeks to ruin Othello and Desdemona and Cassio, not for any motive he may allege or imagine, but mainly because he is Iago, because he is what he is. Shakspere has created a character of absolute foulness, lacking the self-captivating casuistry by which feebler men might

justify themselves; and he has projected this sinister personality with so compelling a power that we cannot but accept Iago for what he is, a creature capable of "motiveless malignity" and of doing evil for the sake of evil. A stage-villain he is externally, no doubt; and perhaps Shakspere conceived him primarily as a stage-villain—a larger-sized Don John or Richard, a necessary cog in the wheel of fate; but whatever Shakspere's original intent may have been, he goes far beyond it. And, as a result, Iago transcends the type. He is alive in every fiber; and we follow his misdeeds without question as to his motives, careless as to the force which impels him. He has a self-control so marvelous that he impresses all who know him as bluff and plain-spoken and devoid of guile; and Shakspere has character after character call him "honest," so that we may the more readily accept Iago's apparently unwilling testimony against Desdemona and Cassio.

There is no denying that Shakspere is false to the facts of life in allowing Iago to be so frank in regard to his own villainy, as he was earlier in letting Richard III see himself as others saw him. The Elizabethan tradition which authorized this departure from truth had advantages which Shakspere never thought of relinquishing. When he availed himself of this labor-saving device he debarred himself from the subtler and more artistic method employed by Molière in presenting Tartuffe, the only other villain in the whole range of dramatic literature who is comparable with Iago (since Mephistopheles is not a man but the devil himself). Tartuffe has not the overwhelming vigor of Iago; he is a villainous hypocrite rather than a hypocritical villain, and he is devoid of the humor which Iago has in abundance, harsh and bitter as this may be. But Tartuffe shares with Iago pride of intellect and also sub-

lime self-confidence and scorching contempt for those he is deceiving. He even has the same phrase for Orgon that Iago has for Othello and calls him a man to be led by the nose. But he is a smaller figure than Iago; he is rather a self-seeking rascal and a practical adventurer in his own behalf than the ideal villain which Iago is. He may be closer to the facts of reality than Iago, but he is not more intimately related to the truth of life. Yet inferior as Tartuffe may be to Iago in height, and even in depth, Molière has presented him, if not more artistically, at least in accord with a later and a more acceptable method. Tartuffe has not a single soliloquy in which to lay bare his black soul, and not a single aside to disclose to us his real intent.

Although Molière's play takes its name from the hypocrite, and although he is also the mainspring of its action, Tartuffe does not come before us until the third of its five acts; and Molière exerts his utmost skill so to prepare for the first appearance of Tartuffe that we are never in doubt as to his true character, even if he never departs from the speech of piety which is the cloak for his evil designs, a cloak not to be laid aside until it is no longer serviceable. Tightly as he may tuck this garment about him, we see beneath his fair words and his soft speeches; and we await impatiently the moment when the raiment of hypocrisy shall be stripped from him and he shall stand forth naked. That Iago lingers in our memories as a more sinister figure than Tartuffe is due partly to the fact that Shakspere puts his villain into a tragedy to work irrevocable ruin, whereas Molière's play, serious as it may be at moments, is a comedy after all, a comedy which has to end happily after the defeated rascal is haled to prison.

Professor Bradley has warned us that we need not believe what Iago tells Roderigo in the opening scene. His account of Othello's refusal to give him the post bestowed on Cassio may not be true, since we have only Iago's word for it; and it may be only his mendacious invention on the spur of the moment. But Shakspere was too experienced a playwright not to know that the spectator cannot help forming his impression of characters not yet seen from what is said about them before they appear. This is one of the most useful devices of dramaturgy; and we may rest assured that Shakspere put these speeches in Iago's mouth for the definite purpose of making clear to the audience that Iago believes he has reason to detest Othello. The actual truth of what Iago says does not matter. What matters is the predisposing effect these speeches have upon the minds of the audience.

IV

Powerfully as Iago may etch himself into our memories, he is not the central person in the play; he may be the mainspring of the action, but he is not the tragic hero. If he had been the central figure, then we should have only a play of intrigue. As it is, the drama is elevated to the loftier plane of the tragedy of character by the massive nobility of Othello himself and by the appealing sweetness of Desdemona. She is all purity, all affection, all devotion; and Othello, who is too large of build to be jealous by nature, knows her for what she is and loves her with all the force of his deeper soul. And yet we see him made jealous by the fiendish cunning of Iago. The jealousy that Iago arouses at last in Othello "converts human nature into chaos and liberates the beast in man," as Pro-

fessor Bradley declares. "Iago's plot is Iago's character in action; and it is built on his knowledge of Othello's character, and it could not otherwise have succeeded." In sheer dramaturgic dexterity, in the art of leading up to a situation and of handling it when it arrives in such fashion as to express from it all possible emotion, there is scarcely a scene in all dramatic literature more skilful than this. Here we see the poet-psychologist working with and supported by the playwright of genius.

And the later scene of accusation between Othello and Desdemona is treated with equal mastery of stage-craft and with equal subtlety of insight into character. Desdemona is marvelously understood and rendered. Coleridge quoted Pope's "most women have no character at all" and asserted that while Pope meant this for satire, Shakspere, who knew man and woman much better, saw that in the eyes of the other sex it was in fact the perfection of woman to be characterless. "Every one wishes a Desdemona or Ophelia for a wife—creatures who, though they may not always understand you, do always feel you, and feel with you." And never did Shakspere present this special feminine type with a firmer delicacy. A little colorless Desdemona may be, as Ophelia is also (a part plainly composed for the same boy actor); but she is not really characterless, even in the sense that Coleridge suggested. She is a true woman, with unfailing delicacy. She refuses to repeat the hateful word that Othello used to her. In her great love she is not indignant with him; rather is she astonished and stunned. She had deceived her father; she had half equivocated about the handkerchief; her last words are a lie; and she dies trying to defend the husband who has slain her. She does not understand Othello's action, but she pardons it out of

the fulness of her love. She is incapable of perceiving that Othello kills her, not as an act of violent vengeance, but as a solemn and righteous execution of a guilty wife.

Shakspere sympathizes with her, even if he does not spare the spectators the almost unbearable pain of her murder. He sympathizes also with Othello, as he does with Cassio and Emilia in a less degree. One might almost venture the assertion that, artistically, at least, he even sympathizes with Iago. He understands them all, and he includes them all in his sympathy, because he understands them. This vibrating sympathy with his characters is a most marked feature of all Shakspere's later and greater tragedies. He does not take sides with any one of them against the others; and he is never unfair in his preferences. He feels with all his creatures; and there is a warm glow in the light under which they are presented to us. And here is where Shakspere is in sharpest contrast with the two great tragic writers of the rival modern literature. Corneille, and Racine also, seem a little chilly, not to say callous, toward the misfortunes and sufferings of their heroes and heroines. Perhaps it would be going too far to assert that there is a lack of humanity in certain of the finest of French tragedies, but at least there is an undeniable absence of feeling. Brunetière called attention to the unemotional manner in which Corneille brings about the horrible catastrophe of 'Rodogune' and to the cold-blooded unscrupulousness with which Racine's Roxane strangles Bajazet.

Shakspere's sympathy extends to the subordinate figures, like Cassio and Emilia. Cassio is admirably understood; and we are made to see his strength as well as his weakness. He appears only infrequently and yet we know him as we know Othello himself and Desdemona.

Contrast of character is always an element of dramatic effect, and Cassio with his lightness is a relief to the massive simplicity of Othello and a foil to the subtle complexity of Iago. And in like manner Emilia is set over against Desdemona to whom she is devotedly attached. Emilia is bold and blunt; she is honest but coarse of fiber. She is an earthy-minded woman, and yet she is capable of appreciating the exquisite purity of Desdemona. The very disparity of their natures is a bond of attraction. And it may be noted furthermore that Emilia is so frank of speech that she is unlikely to be free of conduct. Iago, who suspected all women, had no real reason for suspecting his wife, even if he did suspect her, which may be doubted, since we have only his own word for it.

Characters these all are of an inexpugnable veracity, and parts they are also, composed for particular actors to whom Shakspere was giving the kind of work of which they had already proved themselves capable. Burbage was Othello, as he had been Romeo and Hamlet; and the serving man, who obtrudes only in a scene or two, and who is frankly called the "clown," was probably undertaken by Armin. Iago fell to the lot of the actor, probably Condell, who was soon to create Edgar in 'Lear,' as Brabantio fell to the actor who had created Leonato in 'Much Ado.' Cassio must have been performed by the comedian who had previously played Mercutio and Gratiano and Lucio. Desdemona was personated by the lad who had earlier personated Ophelia and Viola; and Emilia was cast to the boy with the robuster method who had already played Mrs. Ford and Maria. And perhaps we are justified in believing that Shakspere intrusted himself with the Duke, a part which would

naturally be assumed by the actor who had been seen as Adam in 'As you Like it' and as the Ghost in 'Hamlet.'

The characters are not more skilfully contrasted nor the parts more carefully distributed among the members of the company than is their speech artistically differentiated in accord with the importance of each and with his function in the play. Cassio, for example, nearly always speaks in prose, elevated and rhythmic, but not absolutely metrical. Othello uses blank verse and is unfailingly poetic in his utterance. Rime is infrequent, and as there is little that is purely lyric in the play we find few of those riming passages, couplet after couplet, generally stuffed with fanciful conceits and balanced comparisons, such as we may often note in most of his preceding pieces, more especially in 'All's Well.' Rime appears now and again in an exit-speech, in accord with the Elizabethan tradition. And it is occasionally used for emphasis, apparently, as in Brabantio's warning to Othello that the woman who has deceived her father may deceive her husband. Iago drops into rime occasionally, probably for emphasis again, although this is not quite so certain an explanation. Here we perceive that Shakspere has now arrived at a complete mastery of his tools. He is able to use at will that which is fittest for his immediate purpose; and he seems to do this without taking thought. Certainly he can do it without attracting our attention to his technic.

CHAPTER XIV

THE PLAYS FROM PLUTARCH

I

It is in the English Holinshed that Shakspere finds the facts for his chronicle-plays; and it is from the Greek Plutarch that he takes over the figures which stand out boldly in his three Roman pieces, 'Julius Cæsar,' 'Antony and Cleopatra' and 'Coriolanus.' These plays he composes only after he or his contemporaries had exhausted the gallery of English kings. For these Roman dramas he has no pattern, such as Marlowe's 'Edward II' supplied him for 'Richard II'; and he has no pre-existing piece, like the 'Famous Victories,' to be revised and enriched. The earliest of the plays he founds on Plutarch is 'Julius Cæsar,' which seems to have been written before the three somber comedies and before 'Hamlet' and 'Othello.' Chronologically considered 'Julius Cæsar' is a connecting link between the earlier histories and the later tragedies. Not only chronologically does 'Julius Cæsar' lie between 'Henry V' and 'Hamlet,' but dramaturgically also. It has a little more formal symmetry of design than the sprawling chronicle-plays that preceded it and a less obvious unity of theme than 'Hamlet' or 'Macbeth.' Indeed, the movement of 'Julius Cæsar' is less straightforward than that of the earlier and more lyrical 'Romeo and Juliet'; and the later 'Antony and Cleopatra' is almost as episodic as 'Henry V.'

It must remain always doubtful how far Shakspere's art

as a play-maker is conscious and deliberate. He has never chosen to take us into his confidence and to let us know whether or not he held any definite theory of dramaturgy. He leaves us to deduce his principles from his practice. He goes out of his way to discuss the art of acting; and he delights in drawing on the histrionic vocabulary for figures of speech. But as to stagecraft he is singularly silent. Where Ben Jonson is voluble, Shakspere is reticent. We are left to conjecture how far he holds any theories of playmaking of which he is himself aware. That he has his own code of principles, even if he never formulated them to himself, we cannot doubt; and we can detect the motives which guide him, even if we cannot be sure that he himself would always admit the existence of the rules, the results of which we might declare. We can see that 'Macbeth' has an orderly and logical movement of a kind which we fail to discover in 'King John,' for example; but it is quite possible that to Shakspere himself 'Macbeth' was after all only a chronicle-play, although he has taken pains to make it better as a play than any of the English histories.

Even if Shakspere does not work according to any body of doctrine rigidly held, and even if he might have been at a loss to give a clear definition of the type of tragedy to which he attained most completely in 'Othello,' a comparison of 'Hamlet,' 'Othello' and 'Macbeth' will reveal certain things which these plays have in common and which we may, therefore, accept as the dominant characteristics of Shaksperian tragedy. These characteristics have been singled out and set in order by Professor Bradley. When Shakspere is moved to put forth his full powers as playwright and as poet, as psychologist and as philosopher, he sets before us a tale of suffering and ca-

lamity, conducting to the death of the hero, who is always a conspicuous person, prominent in the state. The part of the hero's career which is shown in action on the stage is that which more immediately precedes and leads up to his death, he having been introduced to us at first in a fairly happy condition. And the later calamity and suffering are unexpected, exceptional and striking. As a whole, the tragedy brings home to us an abiding sense of "the powerlessness of man," and it makes us feel that the fatal end follows inevitably and inexorably "from the deeds of men, and that the main source of these deeds is character." The hero, who is always of heroic size, is destroyed by his own failing, which is his ruling quality, at once his strength and his weakness. He is not the victim of the merely external forces against which he struggles in vain; rather is he betrayed by himself. He goes down because he is what he is. And, as a result, his downfall and death may be pitiful but they are not painful. We understand the reasons and we are reconciled to the result. The spectacle of the hero's self-destruction is not depressing, since there is nothing petty in it and nothing accidental.

This definition of Shaksperian tragedy, rephrased from Professor Bradley, completely covers 'Hamlet,' 'Othello' and 'Macbeth.' It covers also the three Roman plays, although they lack the skilful structure of the three tragedies. There is less care in the putting together of 'Antony and Cleopatra,' and even of 'Coriolanus,' than there is in the framing of 'Macbeth.' The stories of the pieces taken from Plutarch may straggle like those of the pieces taken from Holinshed and the episodes may be as sporadic; but even if the dramaturgic method is that of the chronicle-plays, the spirit is that of the greater tragedies.

Brutus and Antony and Coriolanus are truly tragic heroes, of exceptional greatness of soul, even if the actions in which they severally appear are not carefully knit and knotted into compelling symmetry. Like most of the English histories the Roman plays are theatrically effective only at intervals. Even if they have a less sluggish movement than the chronicle-plays, they have a more sharply defined struggle, partly individual and indeed internal, but also partly national, and in two of the three, almost international.

Shakspere deals with Plutarch as liberally as he had dealt with Holinshed. He finds in his source a story, with characters vigorous and contrasting. He borrows motive, movement and color—even local color, although he never goes out of his way in search of this. He gets far more from the Greek portrait-painter than from the English annalist, because Plutarch supplies him with far more suggestions of the kind he can utilize, since the old philosopher, although he wrote in prose, was also a poet. Shakspere transposes, he condenses, he heightens; but he rarely contradicts Plutarch, as he had unhesitatingly contradicted Holinshed. He takes over the succession of events, but he hurries the time; and in the plays he makes things happen in close connection, one with another, which were historically separated by weeks and even by months.

Frequently Shakspere carries over into his dialogue the actual phrase which he found in the English rendering (more often in 'Julius Cæsar' than in the two others); and thus he is helped by the translation itself. The style of Plutarch is a little sophisticated, as was natural enough in a Greek of the first century. Amyot had simplified it in his French version; and North's English has an even

larger freedom. The English translation has a homespun style, almost slangy in its verbal picturesqueness; and Shakspere is quick to profit by North's racy vernacular. But while Shakspere assimilates not only the language of North, but also the information supplied to him by Plutarch, he makes no futile effort for historic accuracy. He was no dry-as-dust antiquary, no historical novelist, to try to step off his own shadow in the vain effort to grasp the local color of a foreign and forgotten civilization. He lets a clock strike thrice; he bestows Elizabethan hats and cloaks on his Romans; and he talks of a Latin poet's rimes. In his manners and customs Shakspere does not depart from the knowledge of his own countrymen and his own contemporaries, who made up the audiences at the Globe. He sees no advantage in trying to recapture the habits and usages of any other place. His Roman mobs in 'Julius Cæsar' and in 'Coriolanus' are as English as the Dogberry who lived in Sicily or the Bottom who lived in Athens. What he wants to do and what he has no difficulty in doing is not to make the mobs Roman, but to make them really mobs, composed of living human beings, having in their veins ruddy drops of human blood.

II

Of the three Roman plays 'Julius Cæsar' has always been the most popular in the theater, in spite of the fact that it has no love-interest and that the two women who figure in it are relatively unimportant. It is also devoid of humorous scenes and of humorous characters; it has no Osric and no Gravedigger, no Porter to grumble before he answers the knocking at the gate; it has no "clown" corresponding to the countryman who brings the asp to Cleo-

patra and who extorts a laugh or two by his comic simplicity. It has not the ingenuity of intrigue, which sustains 'Romeo and Juliet' and 'Othello'; intrigue, it may be noted, tends to be exacting and to be sufficient unto itself, as we see in that master of dramaturgy, Scribe, in whose plays plot is so important that there is no room left for character. It has no villain to stand over against the hero. Cassius, it is evident, was cast to the actor of heavy parts (probably the performer of Claudius and Iago), as Brutus must have been undertaken by Burbage, and Mark Antony by the impersonator of Cassio and Laertes.

None the less is 'Julius Cæsar' a most effective stage-play, with a vast theme and a world-wide background, with characters strong of volition and knowing their own minds, with abundant oratory and with a succession of striking episodes all integral to the story. It has also a constantly recurring spectacular accompaniment—the games, the storm at night, the open assassination, the funeral, the riot, the final battle preceded by the appearance of the ghost. The play is a bold portrayal of a dark conspiracy with its immediate success and with the necessary consequences of that unfortunate success. It contains the essential dramatic elements of contrast, conflict and suspense. It deals with ambition, perhaps the noblest of the passions—and assuredly the most dramatic, since it implies a desire of power and authority, and since it is fundamentally wilful. It has a superb exposition, picturesque in itself and at once setting before us the state of affairs in Rome at the time, and making us familiar with the unstable opinions of the populace. This exposition brings us into the murky atmosphere of a treacherous plot, and it arouses the emotion of doubt, of dread, and of

impending doom. Although Brutus may be the tragic hero, the play takes its title from Cæsar, perhaps because his name was the most known, therefore the most attractive to the playgoer, and perhaps because a chronicle-play was always called after the sovran, although his part might not be the most significant. But it is to be said that even if Cæsar is killed in the middle of the piece, his ghost returns toward the end, and his spirit dominates long after his body is burnt. Cæsarism is at the core of the piece; and the acts that follow his assassination reveal the need of a firm hand like his to guide the ship of state. We have here the same political moral that we discover in the earlier English chronicle-plays—that power must be lodged somewhere or else there is chaos in the government and disaster for everybody. It is the dead Cæsar who overcomes Brutus and Cassius at last. Men cannot fight with ghosts; and in the end the victory is with Cæsar, even if he died long before the end came. The piece is thus seen to depart from the looser construction of the chronicle-play and to approach the more dramatic method of the murder-and-revenge play, with its customary ghost, a tangible specter returning to gloat over his impending vengeance and to make that vengeance securer by his reappearance.

'Julius Cæsar' reveals a development of Shakspere's political sagacity. It is the most significant play he wrote between 'Romeo and Juliet' and 'Hamlet.' When we compare it with the earlier tragedy of unhappy love, we cannot fail to see that 'Romeo and Juliet' was the work of a young man, whereas 'Julius Cæsar' discloses a maturer vision of life and a larger insight. It is ripe and mellow, rich and wise, probable and plausible. It displays a practical sense of affairs which few of his earlier

pieces had led us to expect. As an Englishman, living under Elizabeth, Shakspere could appreciate Roman conditions far better than Greek. In 'Troilus and Cressida' he is at sea, whereas in 'Julius Cæsar' his foot is firm on the land. He may not sympathetically apprehend Achilles and Agamemnon, but he understands Brutus and Cassius. The Latin characters and their statecraft he could appreciate by virtue of his own Englishry, even if the greater Greeks were beyond his ken.

Shakspere always takes care of his actors, providing them with histrionic opportunities; but never has he done this more openly and more skilfully than in 'Julius Cæsar.' He here supplies in abundance the kind of speech the actor always delights in. Passage after passage, even the casual utterances of the less important parts, lends itself to declamation independent of the context. But no one of them is extraneous to the action—no one of them is an excursus existing for its own sake. These speeches are never merely rhetorical declamations, because they all serve a dramatic purpose. Since this is a story of statecraft in a country of trained speakers, who were orators as they were soldiers, if not by profession at least by compulsion of circumstance, it is no wonder that the play contains more oratory than any other of Shakspere's pieces. A political play imperatively demands the orator to expound its motives. The set speeches in 'Julius Cæsar' belong properly to a play of conspiracy in a time of turmoil, when the republic was on its death-bed.

The contrast between the funeral speeches of Brutus and Mark Antony makes evident Shakspere's command of both statecraft and stagecraft. Each of them is exactly what that character would then have made; each is excellent in itself, and each reveals at once the strength and

the weakness of the speaker who makes it. Brutus is a vain man, of a large nobility of soul in spite of his conceit; he is an impractical idealist, with a close kinship to many of the professional reformers of our own day, in that he is amazingly self-centered, in that he always takes himself too seriously, and in that he lacks the saving sense of humor that springs from an understanding of his fellowman. His address is the work of a trained rhetorician; it is logical and chilly; it is directed to the intellect of his hearers and not to their emotions; it is egotistic, not to call it pedantic; and it displays a complacent ignorance of the psychology of the crowd. It shows that he had failed to profit by his frequent opportunities to understand the temper of his fellow-citizens. It is proof positive of his lack of political wisdom, and of his unfitness for the part he was playing. He says the things he ought not to have said and he leaves unsaid the things he ought to have said. On the other hand, Mark Antony's address is a model stump speech. It is swift and fiery; it appeals to imagination and to passion. It is not a mere rhetorical exercise, but a masterpiece of persuasion, aimed to accomplish a definite purpose. Mark Antony has all the arts of the supple rhetorician, including that of deprecating his own gifts as an orator in comparison with those of Brutus. The psychology of the crowd that his predecessor ignored or was ignorant of Mark Antony understands and applies. He is sincere in his affection for his dead friend, yet he uses that very devotion as an element of persuasion. He is cunning, sinuous, resourceful; and he plays on the passions of his hearers, that he may at once avenge Cæsar's death and profit by it. Surpassingly clever the speech is in itself, and intensely dramatic in the use to which Shakspere puts it.

The Forum scene is the turning-point of the play, and it must be admitted that the interest flags a little in the ensuing act, as it does more than once in the corresponding moments in others of Shakspere's tragedies. Yet in sheer power of presenting character at the moment of highest tension the quarrel-scene between Brutus and Cassius is not inferior to anything else that Shakspere has given us. Mark Antony's address in the Forum is Shakspere's own, supported by only a fact or two from Plutarch; whereas the quarrel-scene is made up of stray suggestions supplied here and there by Plutarch, but fused and welded by Shakspere's interpretative imagination. It is in this scene with Cassius that Brutus most amply discloses the defects of his character, his touchiness of temper as obvious as the same failing in Cassius, his self-sufficient self-satisfaction, his consequent inability to get on with men, and to get things done, and to make the best of things as they may chance to be. It may be said of him, as it was said of an English statesman of the nineteenth century, that "he was a good man in the worst sense of the word." He abounds in conscious rectitude. He is an impractical politician, a theorist of government, with the loftiest ideals, which he cannot disentangle from his own ambitions. It needed all Shakspere's power to dare this frank delineation of the less amiable traits of his tragic hero, and to succeed in making us accept him as large enough, in spite of these deficiencies, to justify his position in the play. Pettily pedantic Brutus may be at moments, yet he is massive of soul, and he towers aloft above the other characters, as a tragic hero should, larger in mold than any of them.

III

'Julius Cæsar' was pretty certainly written before 'Hamlet,' and 'Antony and Cleopatra' was apparently not composed until after 'Macbeth.' 'Antony and Cleopatra' has the lofty elevation and the imaginative energy of the tragedies of Shakspere's maturity; but it has all the laxity of form which we find in the chronicle-plays of his youth. It has unity of theme without unity of structure. It is the longest of all Shakspere's plays, and it drags languidly in the third and fourth of the acts into which our modern editions divide it. In these texts the play is made to appear even more disjointed than it is because it has been needlessly snippeted into brief scenes by the unfortunate zeal of unenlightened editors who did not realize the conditions of the Elizabethan stage. But even if we disregard these misleading devices as far as may be, our interest is still distracted by the frequent shiftings of locality—more than a score in these two acts. With characteristic obtuseness Doctor Johnson asserted that "the power of delighting is derived principally from the frequent changes of scene." The fact is that Shakspere here loses his subject in a heterogeny of episodes, and the action moves in a choppy sea, if indeed it can be said really to advance at all; rather does it revolve, turning on itself. The defeat at Actium is in the third act, and the death of Antony in the fourth. The current of the story does not flow in a broad stream sweeping all before it; it meanders away through several mouths. Things seem merely to happen rather than to be caused by the persons, and as a result the play as a play appears to lack a controlling purpose. When tested by

any strict standard, either ancient or modern, it is not a well-built drama.

Possibly this is the explanation of the fact that it made little impression upon Shakspere's contemporaries, a fact established by the absence of allusions to the play or of quotations from it in the writings of the time. And it has never been able to win any protracted popularity in the playhouses of to-day. It is revived from time to time in the modern theater by managers and by actors, tempted by its many opportunities, both histrionic and spectacular; and it is always discovered to be more or less disappointing to the audiences, who had naturally supposed that what was powerfully moving in the reading would be even more delightful in the performance. This experience may be taken as evidence that here, for once, is a piece of Shakspere's which is less effective on the stage than in the study; that is to say, it is a piece in which the poet and the psychologist, who were united in Shakspere, have not been properly supported by the playwright, who must always bear the main burden in the theater itself.

When we ask ourselves why a play which Coleridge held to be a powerful rival of 'Hamlet' and of 'Macbeth' should not rivet the interest of the audience as these two great tragedies have ever done, the first explanation which suggests itself is that the Mark Antony of 'Antony and Cleopatra' is not the Mark Antony of 'Julius Cæsar.' This difference is not due solely to the circumstance that he is older. The change is brought about necessarily by the fact that he is now a character in another play having another color. In any drama of real value the story must be what the characters make it; but none the less can the characters be only what the story allows. If a character

is taken out of one play and put into another with not only different incidents, but also a different tone and temper, the figure thus carried over is subjected to a sea-change. Even if he remains fundamentally the same he can now exhibit only those traits which are permitted in the later drama. Already have we seen that the Falstaff and the Mrs. Quickly of the 'Merry Wives' are not quite the Falstaff and not at all the Mrs. Quickly of 'Henry IV.' So the Creon of the 'Antigone' is not the Creon of 'Œdipus the King.'

Now, the Antony of 'Julius Cæsar' is a truly dramatic personality, in that he abounds in volition. He knows his own mind and he goes straight for what he wants without hesitation or delay. He has the frank directness of will which always arouses and retains the interest of an audience. But the Antony of 'Antony and Cleopatra' is infirm of purpose; he wavers and he falters; he sets out on an enterprise and then turns back out of caprice; he drifts with irresolution. Thus he has ceased to be the truly dramatic personality which he was in 'Julius Cæsar'—that is to say, he is less dramatic on the stage itself, in the actual theater before the massed spectators, even if he may be, as indeed he is, more complex and more interesting when we are alone with him in the study. Here, very likely, is the fatal dramaturgic defect of the tragedy as an acted play. Captivated by the charm of the historic situation, Shakspere neglects to find some way of bestowing upon his hero that firm determination which appears to be imperative in the chief figure of a play that is to please long and please many in the playhouse itself.

This special defect of Shakspere's tragedy, considered solely as a stage-play, is not to be found in Dryden's re-

handling of the same theme. In 'All for Love, or The World Well Lost,' Antony may lack the largeness and the majesty of Shakspere's hero, but he is less vacillating and he moves more directly to his doom. Dryden, it must be noted also, has concentrated his action; and Scott is justified in his opinion that the plan of Dryden's play is to be preferred to that of Shakspere in "coherence and simplicity." That 'All for Love' kept the stage for a century is evidence in behalf of the soundness of Scott's opinion. Yet it is strange that Dryden should for once have succeeded where Shakspere was less successful, since he was not a born playwright, but rather a poet who made plays against the grain, whereas Shakspere was a playwright by native gift. 'All for Love' is Dryden's best drama, beyond all question; but, except in its planning, it is a poor thing by the side of Shakspere's, as Scott has frankly admitted.

The strength of 'Antony and Cleopatra' lies in the marvelous truth with which these two characters are presented in their fatal relations with each other. In 'Julius Cæsar' there is no love-scene; 'Antony and Cleopatra' is all love, and it is a succession of love-scenes. As Shakspere had given us in 'Romeo and Juliet' the tragedy of young love triumphant even in death, so now he gives us the tragedy of sexual passion when it holds in its unrelenting grasp a man and a woman of riper maturity. Cleopatra is not in the first bloom of youth; she is almost as old as Balzac's "woman of thirty"; and Antony has attained to what another French writer has called the "dangerous age" for a man of amorous temperament. And Shakspere presents them both with uncompromising veracity, extenuating nothing and setting down naught in malice, while at the same time he has abundant artistic

sympathy for his characters. He is fair to both of them. He never disguises the disintegrating results of Cleopatra's feminine charm; but he never shows her up as Thackeray shows up his Becky Sharp. Rather does he love her, as Taine declares that Balzac loved his Madame Marneffe, lavishing upon her an affectionate solicitude.

It is not as a Greek but as a gipsy that Shakspere sees Cleopatra, a bewitching enchantress, mistress of every art of fascination, all the more dangerous because of her experience, and making her profit out of all her previous amorous adventures. Love is her whole existence; and this is the last grand passion of her life. She has the sovran grace of a queen and also the undisguised arts of a true courtezan. Her voluptuous coquetry is an incessant provocation to arouse desire. Yet Shakspere does not base her charm upon her beauty alone, or even on her infinite variety of amatory expedient. Her appeal to Antony is intellectual as well as sensual; and so is his appeal to her. It is the whole woman and the whole man, soul as well as body, which draw them together. Each has found at last an elective affinity. Each was made for the other; and they were fitly joined. In their higher natures, as well as their lower, they are paired; and each drags the other down.

But there can be neither respect nor self-respect in their union; she has been the mistress of Julius Cæsar and of the younger Pompey, and he has deserted two wives in succession to be the bond-slave of his adulterous passion for her. And they do not feel the need of self-respect, for they are both selfish and callous, except in their relations to each other. They obey their caprices of the moment without scruple and without remorse. They have no compunctions and no moral sense. And few of the other charac-

ters by whom they are surrounded are any better furnished with morality. There is little loyalty in any of them, save in Eros and in Cleopatra's women. All is demoralization, degeneracy, disintegration. The motto of every man is "every man for himself"; and even Enobarbus is found wanting at the supreme moment—Enobarbus who was Antony's trusted chief of staff and whom Shakspere employs on occasion as a chorus, as a transmitting medium to suggest to the spectators the point of view he wants them to take. The poet preaches no moral himself, but the moral is there, none the less, writ plain for all to see. Whatever its dramaturgic deficiencies, 'Antony and Cleopatra' is for the mere reader what Coleridge called it, a powerful rival to the mightiest of Shakspere's tragedies.

IV

The will power, which is relaxed in 'Antony and Cleopatra,' is stiffened in 'Coriolanus.' The hero of the latest of the three Roman plays knows his own mind and speaks it freely and frequently. Perhaps the weakness of volition which we discover in Antony, and which is a main reason why the play wherein he is a leading figure has never achieved a lasting popularity among playgoers, is unavoidable in that drama, since it is integral to the historic fact represented in the play. And the firmness of volition, which is the dominating quality of Coriolanus, might be expected to bestow upon the later piece the attractiveness in the theater that 'Antony and Cleopatra' has been found to lack. But this it has not done, largely because Shakspere has chosen to give us a narrative in dialogue rather than a true drama. It is the least often represented in the theater of the three plays from

Plutarch; indeed, it reappears on the stage only when an actor of overvaulting ambition demands a histrionic opportunity. It has all the looseness of the earlier chronicle-plays without the one or more attractive personalities which we find in the English histories. And even though its story is taken from a historian, it seems out of nature in its artificial arbitrariness. It looks like a special instance, contradicting the result of the average man's observation of life.

We may go further and assert that the subject of the piece could be made alluring in the theater only by an extraordinary exercise of playmaking skill in bestowing on the play a sustaining intricacy of intrigue, through ingenious elaboration of plot or through the insertion of a love-interest so presented as not to appear extraneous. This effort to make the theme more appetizing Shakspere has not made. 'Coriolanus' is a one-part play, as was 'Richard III'; but the Roman piece is without the theatric variety and the psychologic interest of the English history. It is intolerably monotonous in its insistence upon a single character, dominated by a single unlovely characteristic—an overmastering pride, supported by an inhuman contempt for all who do not belong to his own caste. Pride goes before a fall, and Coriolanus sinks to the infamy of becoming a traitor who takes command of the enemies of Rome and leads them victorious to her walls. For this baseness he may have provocation enough, but he has no real justification, and he admits himself that his revenge on his native city is due to spite.

Shakspere exaggerates beyond belief the personal exploits of his hero. Coriolanus is a stalwart fighter, but he reveals none of the qualities of a great general. He has immense pride in his own prowess, in the strength of his

thews; but he is narrow-minded and lacking in any genuine magnanimity of soul. He is ill-balanced and overbearing; and such a character is too devoid of variety to attract playgoers, even if it had been exhibited in an artfully contrived plot, which 'Coriolanus' has not. Moreover, the one really dramatic situation in the story that Shakspere finds in Plutarch—the surrender of Coriolanus to the appeal of his mother to spare the Rome which has turned him out—even this is not made to yield its full effect. It is probably this situation which led Shakspere to select the subject; and yet this scene is not as well done as Shakspere has handled corresponding situations in other plays. The speech of Volumnia to Coriolanus is a specimen of swelling eloquence, a towering example of rhetorical amplification, a big speech in itself, but it is wanting in heartfelt sincerity. A few simple moving words would have served the purpose better than this sonorous oration. Although there is no weakening here of the poet's power or of his intelligence, there seems to be a slackening of enthusiasm and a consequent diminution of emotional appeal.

To this we may also ascribe the hardness of the play as a whole, its metallic brilliancy, its repellent temper. The atmosphere is petty and the political conflict in Rome is but a paltry faction fight. In 'Julius Cæsar' the clash of the contending parties is a struggle for imperial dominion; and in 'Coriolanus' it is only an intramural squabble. In 'Julius Cæsar' we have world-politics, and in 'Coriolanus' only ward-politics. We do not sympathize with either party, and plainly enough Shakspere does not mean us to do so. He does not take sides himself, and we do not. He is impartial, and we have an equal dislike for both of the contending groups. The

plebeians are crass and cowardly, and the patricians are cowardly and incapable. The mob is as flighty and as feather-brained as the mob in 'Julius Cæsar'; and the fathers of the city act rather as stepfathers, selfish and self-seeking. On both sides there is a plentiful lack of common sense and of right feeling.

V

It is to be noted that Shakspere does not extenuate the hard-hearted and cold-blooded character of his hero, the stupidity of the aristocrats and the folly of the democrats who are misled by a pair of demagogues. He holds no brief for either party or for any character; and in this he discloses himself as truly a dramatist. It has been maintained that he was not a democrat himself, but an aristocrat rather, not to say a snob, in his attitude toward the plain people; and the evidence in support of this has been derived partly from 'Coriolanus,' partly from 'Julius Cæsar' and partly from the Jack Cade episodes in 'Henry VI.' It has been urged that these passages, taken collectively, show that Shakspere had no liking for the populace. This assertion has a certain specious plausibility. If phrases are taken from the mouths of Shakspere's characters and transferred to Shakspere himself, then there is no difficulty in making up a mass of derogatory expressions, full of bitter contempt for the people.

But of course this is just what we have no right to do. Shakspere may not be a democrat, but he is a dramatist, and he lets all his creatures express themselves in their own words and utter amply what they may have in their own hearts. If these characters are disdainful aristocrats, then he allows them to express their contempt for

the vulgar herd; and there is no justification for the assumption that they are serving at that moment as the mouthpieces of Shakspere himself. The dramatic poet differs from the lyric poet mainly in his possession of the power of projecting himself into other personalities and of keeping his own opinion to himself as far as this is possible. What Shakspere says in his sonnets and in his narrative poems we may accept, if we choose, as what he thought and felt as Shakspere. But what Jack Cade or Coriolanus may say in the plays wherein they appear is what Jack Cade and Coriolanus must say if they are to obey the law of their own being.

Other adverse critics there are who admit the injustice of crediting Shakspere with the sayings of his characters, and yet who urge that he clearly discloses his dislike for the plain people in the handling of the several mob-scenes in which the populace is presented as foolish, fickle and easily captivated by empty claptrap. And there is no denying that thus presented the charge has a far firmer support, and that it is not to be met by the mere assertion of any dramatic necessity for so representing the populace. When we study the mob-scenes we can hardly escape the conviction that Shakspere detested and despised the mob. But who of us does not—even to-day in these democratic times? It is the mob that Shakspere seems to despise, and not the whole people, of which the mob is only a single constituent element and the least worthy. The mob is the residuum of the populace, the baser part in its basest aspects. It is as dangerous to-day and as much to be dreaded as it was when Coriolanus and Julius Cæsar were alive; and Shakspere's abhorrence of it is now shared by all who recall the Lord George Gordon disturbances in London, the draft riots in New York,

and the inexcusable excesses of the closing hours of the Commune in Paris.

So far as we can judge from his plays, Shakspere has the universal toleration which comes from universal understanding. He has no liking for silly mobs, as he has no liking for bloody tyrants or for foppish courtiers. Richard III and Macbeth are monarchs whose dark natures he makes us see for ourselves, as he also exposes Le Beau and Osric in all their empty pretentiousness. He is not a snob, nor is he a sycophant. He was almost the only poet who did not come forward with a dirge or an elegy after the death of Elizabeth. Yet it is probably true that he was not a democrat, and that he believed in a firm rule for the state, which in his day meant a monarchy. And here he was in accord with the most enlightened opinion of his own time and of his own country. So far as we can judge, he was no political theorist anticipating the experiments of the future. The poet may be a prophet on occasion, it is true; but a dramatic poet must live in the present, and he cannot proclaim in his plays theories and speculations too far in advance of the average apprehension of the contemporary audiences whose tastes he has to please.

That Shakspere believed in the good feeling and in the intelligent receptivity of the average man is shown by his freely putting the best of himself into his plays, meant for the plain people. All his poetry and all his philosophy are lavished on that splendid succession of dramas designed to delight the Londoners, well-bred and ill-bred, who crowded the Globe Theater. When we consider these dramas we are compelled to credit Shakspere with intense human sympathy, the noblest quality of our modern democratic movement. He may expose the cruel

king, he may despise the trifling courtier, he may detest the vacillating mob, but he takes pleasure in putting into his plays humble characters who live their unobtrusive lives in all honesty. The most engaging figure in 'Henry V' is the frank soldier Williams; and the only fine character in 'Antony and Cleopatra' is the enfranchised slave Eros, who slays himself when he is called upon to kill the master he loves. There is no gainsaying Walter Bagehot's assertion that throughout all Shakspere's plays we "see an amazing sympathy with common people, rather an excessive tendency to dwell on the common features of ordinary lives."

CHAPTER XV

'KING LEAR'

I

Shelley, an admirable judge of poetic excellence, called 'King Lear' "the most perfect specimen of dramatic poetry existing in the world." On the other hand, Thackeray, whose appreciation was limited rather to the plausibilities of real life, once saw 'King Lear' acted, and he confessed that he found it a bore; "it is almost blasphemy to say that a play of Shakspere's is bad, but I can't help it, if I think so." A large majority of those most competent to form a just opinion are in accord with Shelley; and yet there are not a few who incline rather to Thackeray's severe judgment. It may not be easy to reconcile these opposing views; but it ought not to be impossible to find the explanation for their existence.

It seems likely that Shelley, and most of those who are enthusiastic in eulogy of 'King Lear,' are judging it from the printed page, whereas Thackeray was recording his impression after an actual performance in the theater itself. In general, it may be maintained firmly that the plays of any truly dramatic poet, having been composed with an eye single to the stage, produce their full power only in the theater itself. Charles Lamb, with characteristic paradox, dwelt on the disadvantage of seeing Shakspere's noblest characters impersonated even by actors gifted as Kemble and Siddons; yet he seems never to have neglected an opportunity to profit by these performances. George

Eliot was frank in declaring that she liked to see Shakspere's plays acted "better than any others." It may be admitted that there are beauties in all the masterpieces of the poetic drama, which disclose themselves only to the solitary student, and that these plays have a complex richness which cannot be seized at once by the main body of spectators. On the other hand, the essential dramatic quality of any play is best proved by a performance, certain to make clear the solidity of structure which alone bestows enduring vitality upon a drama. The theater itself brings out the bold masses and the broad movement, even if the library may discover many felicities of phrase and subtleties of character delineation left in the shadow when the play is presented on the stage. It is possible also that the poet, writing primarily for the playhouse, may not limit himself to its conditions, and that he may put into his play more than the playgoers could appreciate. More than once, and especially in the composition of 'King Lear,' this appears to have been the case with Shakspere. He writes for the stage, of course, and for the company of actors at the Globe, and for the audiences which flocked to that theater; but sometimes he seems to get so tremendously absorbed in his work that he transcends the temporary and immediate needs of his theater, and then, in Goethe's fine phrase, he feels that "the whole visible world is too narrow for his mind." As a result of this outburst of imaginative energy, the play gains in epic grandeur; but it suffers also in that it is charged with a message too mighty for it.

It needs to be noted yet once again that Shakspere fits his play to his own theater and to its conditions, and that these are not the conditions of the theaters in which 'King Lear' may be acted to-day. His stage was unencumbered

with scenery and its devices for creating illusion were few and simple. He calls up before the spectators the vision of Dover Cliff or of the desolate heath with its pelting storm by the sheer poetry of the speeches he puts into the mouths of his characters. The modern playgoer expects and demands that the scene-painters shall realize these places for him and that the stage-managers shall frighten his ears with the roar of the tempest. Whether the sixteenth-century stage was inferior or superior to that of the twentieth century is a question that calls for no discussion here; assuredly they were different. Their methods were not the same and the possibilities of the Tudor theater were other than those of our snug modern playhouses with their realistic scenery and their multiplied ingenuities of stage-management. The theater for which Shakspere composed his plays and to the conditions of which he adjusted them was the Elizabethan theater, not the Victorian; and all his plays need to be rearranged and at times even mangled, if they are now to be performed. They all gain by any performance, since it is for performance that they were planned; but they all lose by this readjustment—and no one of them loses more than 'King Lear.' Its sublimity, which stood out stark upon the bare Elizabethan stage, is sadly diminished, not to say obscured, by the elaborate scenery, the complicated trappings and the multitudinous effects with which it is perforce represented to-day. And in our theaters it is difficult not to feel that 'King Lear' is a little out of place and that it cannot really be refashioned to suit conditions wholly unlike those in accord with which it came into being. Furthermore, it makes extraordinary demands upon its actors—demands which can very rarely be met now, even if they were met by

Shakspere's own company. More easily than any other of his plays can it be betrayed by the performers; and this may have been the case when Thackeray saw it.

Here, then, is one explanation for the divergence of opinion about this play. When Shelley praised it as a masterpiece of dramatic poetry, he had visualized it by dint of imagination in an ideal performance, and he was not drawing on his memory of any disenchanting representation; whereas Thackeray may have been discouraged by the inadequacy and the incongruity of the performance he had witnessed. And it is to be remembered also that in reading our minds are attuned to the poetry and we give a more languid attention to the action, to the plot, to the story itself—factors vividly impressed upon us by any representation before our eyes. Now 'King Lear' is as Elizabethan in its story as it is Elizabethan in its theatrical form. When we see it acted the lack of plausibility is brought home to us, the unreality of the action, the medieval remoteness of the theme and the absence of any intimate relation to the facts of ordinary life as we know them for ourselves by every-day observation. King Lear himself is too special a character, too high-strung, too ranting in his explosive violence, for us to accept easily when we see him in the flesh before us; and the motives which govern him seem to us strained and exaggerated. To many of us nowadays Lear's insanity is intensely painful, not to say repulsive; and we incline to the belief that madness lies outside the proper limitations of dramatic art and that it unfits a tragic hero for his function.

The story itself, the test of his three daughters, is not more medieval than the test of the three caskets in the 'Merchant of Venice'; but in the comedy this absurdity

is incidental only, whereas in the tragedy it is fundamental. When we see the comedy we are willing enough to make believe with the author, since the play is a comedy and its end is a foreordained happiness in matrimony. When we see the tragedy we discover that the misunderstanding of Lear and Cordelia is the cornerstone of an edifice of appalling and unutterable woe. For this towering tragedy the initial myth is too fragile for our modern insistence upon the probable and the plausible; and we are not so ready to make believe. In the library we are more willing to accept the improbable than in the theater, because this does not call attention to itself with insistent sharpness. Shakspere was most fortunate in happening upon the old play of 'Hamlet,' with its perennial appeal, just when he was ready to handle its theme with the utmost dramaturgic dexterity and to impart to it a deep philosophic significance; and it may be that he was less fortunate in taking up the old play of 'King Leir,' with all its unacceptable artificiality of story and with all its extreme fury of passion, at the moment when his power as a poet was at its ripest maturity and when he was capable of attaining the summit of sublimity.

II

The old play which Shakspere made over into 'Hamlet' is lost. The old play which he made over into 'King Lear' has survived; and we can see for ourselves what he took over, what he left out and what he added. The earlier 'King Leir' is a crude piece of work, devoid of depth and barren of poetry, and yet not without a certain purely theatrical effectiveness. Shakspere follows its

main lines and he finds in it his plot: the relation of Lear to his three daughters. He does not conform to the plan of the earlier playwright, altering unhesitatingly as he sees fit, and killing off Cordelia, who had been spared by his predecessor. He adds matter suggested by several other sources, deriving from a story in Sidney's 'Arcadia' his subplot, the relation of Gloster to his two sons, which he employs as a parallel to the relation of Lear and his three daughters.

This subplot is tied into the main plot with a careful skill which he did not always exhibit when he put two separate stories into one play. Indeed, so far as its earlier acts are concerned, 'King Lear' is one of the most skilfully constructed of all his dramas. The two stories are intricately interwoven, and each of them is made to reinforce the other. The plot as a whole is elaborate and complicated, yet it is coherent and perfectly clear to the spectator. The exposition is swift and arouses expectancy for the events that are to follow. The action tightens immediately and it hurries unresting toward the dimly foreseen doom which lowers above all the characters from the beginning. In the first half of the play the movement is direct, and in fact it does not flag until the fourth act, where we observe the slacking of interest and the confusion of aim which so often characterize this portion of an Elizabethan play. Here the story wavers for a while and the interest is almost dispersed among the less important persons instead of pressing forward with a crescendo of intensity. Even in the final act, when we are eager to follow the fate of Lear himself, our attention is distracted by the prolonged episode of the challenge and duel of Edgar and Edmund. Quite possibly Shakspere is seeking to repeat here the effect he had got out of the fencing-

match in the final act of 'Hamlet,' overlooking the fact that this rivets our attention because Hamlet is one of the participants, whereas Edgar and Edmund usurp the stage and thrust Lear out into the cold. And even the death of Cordelia is the result almost of an accident, or at least it would not have occurred if Edmund had been moved a little earlier to recall his order for her murder.

While the construction, highly expert in the earlier parts of the play, is less praiseworthy in the later portions, all other necessary element of dramaturgy is maintained throughout. The characters are vigorously contrasted, the good against the bad; and they fall into two contending groups, those who love and those who hate. They are all fundamentally dramatic in that they are amply dowered with volition, even the gentle Cordelia knowing her own mind and speaking it on occasion. This is made plainer to us by the care with which Shakspere has unified the action of the older piece at the very moment when he was complicating the plot by adding the story of Gloster and his two sons, one good and one bad, to the story of Lear and his three daughters, one good and two bad. He confines the action to Britain and he reduces the number of separate places where the several episodes are supposed to occur. Moreover, he cuts down the time which is required for the story to reach its fatal end, rushing us to that conclusion breathlessly.

The most important modification which Shakspere made when he worked over the old piece is in the reconception of Lear himself. In the earlier play the aged king does not go mad and there is no storm. It is by the three successive storm-scenes that Shakspere accentuates the poignant pathos of the stricken monarch's situation. And there is nothing in the whole range of the drama compa-

rable with the marvelous meeting at night on a barren heath under the raging tempest of the mad king with the fool and with the man who is assuming madness. Nor is there anything in the earlier play presaging this awe-inspiring scene; the sublimity of this is Shakspere's and Shakspere's alone.

It is a gloomy tale that Shakspere chooses to tell and he does not shrink from embroidering it with needless atrocities. Although it is not a tragedy-of-blood, it has the cold and cruel ferocity of the revenge-plays which held the stage when Shakspere came up to London; and perhaps the unusual number of riming couplets is evidence that Shakspere was consciously returning to an earlier formula. It is a dish of horrors compounded for sturdy Elizabethan digestions, and often it is too strongly flavored for our more dainty palates. It commingles ingratitude and adultery, mendacity and treachery, assassination and parricide. In its higher aspects it is for all time a masterpiece of the master poet of the stage; and in its lower moments it is adjusted to the baser likings of the Elizabethan rabble. The plucking out of Gloster's eyes before the eyes of the spectators, and the crushing of one of them under foot by Cornwall—this is simply hideous, and it is dramatically useless. It is introduced because of its brutality, for the sheer effect of theatrical shock, since there is really no motive for it, as Regan would naturally order Gloster to be killed at once, which is what she later regrets not having done. This scene is repugnant even to the reader; and to the spectator it is absolutely intolerable.

So also the sudden lust of Goneril and Regan for Edmund is not led up to and not made probable, even if we are willing enough to believe that any depravity is

possible in the villainous bastard and in either of the villainous sisters. Edmund is another Iago and obviously composed to be impersonated by the same performer, just as Kent is composed for the actor of Cassio. Edmund has all the iniquity of Iago without the largeness of that incomparable villain. Like Iago he deceives all the persons in the play in turn and he never deceives the audience, to whom he unveils himself in soliloquies in which he stands revealed for what he really is, free from all self-deception. He even borrows several of Iago's devices for hoodwinking Othello and employs them less aptly to trick his father into a belief of his brother's villainy. And he is inferior to Iago in his final motiveless confession, far feebler than the persisting impenitence of Othello's destroyer.

III

It is often urged, and with reason, that a dramatist has the right to choose his story at will and that we have no warrant for quarreling with his choice. We must take his tale as it came to him, whatever its deficiency, improbability or plausibility. As Professor Lounsbury declares, "we give our faith to the fable, however extravagant, because the author has a prescriptive right to require it; because, furthermore, fiction cannot assume anything stranger than what fact actually presents. . . . We demand that the characters shall act in accordance with the motives which under the given conditions would and should dominate their conduct." A little earlier the same acute critic asserted that Shakspere often adopted for his theme a story improbable or even impossible; "that it should be one which would be accepted by his

audience was all that he asked." But his Elizabethan audience had tastes other than ours; and that a theme should be acceptable to them is not to say that it is necessarily acceptable to us three centuries later. Yet there is cogency in the plea that every author is entitled to select the postulate upon which he will build his play. That author is fortunate, however, who can direct our attention only to the consequences of his postulate and avoid forcing us to behold the improbability as it actually happened.

This is what Sophocles was enabled to accomplish in 'Œdipus the King,' thus minimizing the inacceptability of his postulate. An oracle had predicted that the son of Jocasta should slay his father and wed his mother; and when the play opens this double calamity has already come to pass. It is inconceivable that Jocasta, warned by the prediction, should not have investigated immediately the murder of her first husband; and it is even more inconceivable that she should ever have married again with a man young enough to be her son. But these improbabilities, not to call them impossibilities, are in the original myth; and without them there can be no play on that theme. Sophocles takes the story as he finds it and very wisely makes no attempt to explain away its constituent elements; thus he does not call attention in any way to these inacceptable inconsistencies. Things are what they are, that is enough for him; and he exerts his energy in setting before the spectators the appalling consequence of these things.

The postulate of 'King Lear,' the childish project hatched in the head of that high-strung sovran to divide his kingdom among his three daughters in proportion to the affection they severally are willing to express for

him, is not actually impossible, even if it is highly improbable, and even if it is admissible only in a monarch already entering on his dotage. But this is in the original myth, and without it there can be no play on that theme. And it cannot be shirked and merely described. Shakspere cannot follow the example of Sophocles and begin the play at a later moment. This scene is absolutely necessary in itself; it must take place before our eyes; we must see the king, and we must hear each of the three daughters in turn. This actual visual impression makes us see for ourselves the artificiality of the postulate on which the whole play rests. It makes it difficult for us not to perceive the puerility of Lear's scheme and the absurdity of the volcanic rage which its miscarriage arouses in him. The scene itself is written with power and the characters start to life in the course of it; but we can accept it only by putting constraint upon our common sense. Lear's folly is so unmistakable that he is deprived of our sympathy at the start; and even Cordelia's attitude seems a little constrained, not to term it hard or cold.

Yet when all is said, when every deduction has been made, when every cavil has been urged, we must return to the conviction that 'King Lear' is a mighty piece of work which only Shakspere could accomplish, and without which his position as a poet would not be as high as it is. To this play, planned for the theater itself and conformed to the likings of the Elizabethan playgoers, he gives a vague vastness. He peoples the stage with a host of contending characters entangled in the web of an intricate action and often looming larger than the space they are allowed to fill in the story. Apparently these characters took possession of his imagination and ran

riot, compelling him to let them utter their inmost thoughts and to express their unbridled emotions. And as a result the poet ousts the playwright, and the dramatic poem planned as a play to please the public when represented in the playhouse becomes an epic poem of a world-wide universality for which the theater is altogether too small. What he has put into this play is a dim immensity which no play could contain; and what the play loses in dramatic effectiveness the poem gains in epic grandeur. The drama is not only unfitted for performance on our modern picture-frame stage, with its realistic scenery; it is almost equally unfitted for performance on the medieval platform-stage, without any obtrusive scenic accompaniment. It is built too big for any conceivable representation by actors of flesh and blood, because its characters are more than mere human beings; they are monstrous shapes, driven by inexorable fate through a dismal chaos.

"The stage is the test of strictly dramatic quality, and 'King Lear' is too huge for the stage," Professor Bradley remarks, admitting that it is a great stage-play also, with scenes effective in the theater even now, and losing when acted very little of the spell they have for the imagination. "But that which makes the peculiar greatness of 'King Lear'—the immense scope of the work, the mass and variety of intense experience which it contains; the interpenetration of sublime imagination, piercing pathos, and humor almost as moving as the pathos; the vastness of the convulsion both of nature and human passion; the vagueness of the scene where the action takes place, and of the movements of the figures which cross this scene; the strange atmosphere, cold and dark, which strikes on us as we enter this scene, enfolding these figures and

magnifying their dim outlines like a winter mist; the half-realized suggestion of vast universal powers working in the world of individual fates and passions—all this interferes with dramatic clearness even when the play is read, and in the theater not only refuses to reveal itself fully through the senses but seems to be almost in contradiction with their reports." And a little earlier in the lecture from which this quotation is taken Professor Bradley asserted that when he was feeling that 'King Lear' was greater than 'Hamlet' or 'Othello' or 'Macbeth,' and that it was the fullest revelation of Shakspere's power, he found that he was not regarding it simply as a drama, but rather grouping it in his mind "with works like the 'Prometheus Vinctus' and the 'Divine Comedy,' and even with the greatest symphonies of Beethoven and the statues in the Medici chapel."

This is an illuminating criticism, and by its light we can perceive why 'King Lear' made so different an impression upon Shelley and Thackeray. Shakspere intended to write a poetic drama, and what he did write was a dramatic poem. The major merits of 'King Lear' are not so much dramatic as they are epic, just as the major merits of Michael Angelo's mighty figures are epic rather than sculptural. There is an epic element in 'Prometheus Vinctus,' as there is in all the tragedies of Æschylus, and even in some of those of Sophocles; and a similar epic element, although far smaller in proportion, is not uncommon in the Elizabethan drama, most easily recognizable in certain of Marlowe's plays. But in no other Elizabethan drama has this epic element superseded the dramatic element and usurped the attention as triumphantly as in 'King Lear.' And as a result of this wanton excess of the epic over the dramatic the tragedy finds

itself thrust out of the theater, for which it was composed, and relegated to the library, to which Shakspere seems never to have given a thought.

IV

And this brings us to another question, for which it is not easy to find a satisfactory answer. Shakspere was the customary playwright of the Globe Theater, of which he was one of the managers and in which he was an actor himself. It is evident that he planned this play for actual performance by his comrades. Why was it and how was it that in the course of composition he allowed the conditions of actual performance to lose their control? Why did he start to write a play for the theater and end by writing a play too huge for the theater? He did this only once, and in no one of the plays which he prepared after 'King Lear' does he undertake so overwhelming a theme. In all his later dramas the subject is simpler and the crowd of characters is smaller. There are not lacking passages here and there in later plays as well as in earlier, which are too compact or too elusive for immediate apprehension by any audience, however attentive. But only this once does he compose scene after scene which go beyond the boundaries of the acted drama. Only this once does he stand forth a poet rather than a playwright.

In the composition of a poetic play the poet and the playwright must ever work in harmonious sympathy, each supporting the other and yet respecting the exigencies of the other's special art. Yet Sir Walter Besant was shrewd in his assertion that for successful collaboration one of the two participants must be the senior partner with the controlling voice. When the architect and the

sculptor join forces it is the sculptor who is the junior partner if an edifice is to be adorned with statuary, and it is the architect if a group is to be supplied with an appropriate base. When poet and playwright join in the making of a poetic drama the ultimate decision must rest with the playwright and the poet can express himself only within the framework provided for him by his associate. Shakspere accepts this condition in 'Hamlet' and in 'Othello,' and rarely in any other drama does the poet in him demand more than he is willing to grant as a playwright. 'Othello' and 'Hamlet' are poems, beyond all question; they are poetic in theme, poetic in treatment and poetic in atmosphere. None the less are they plays, first of all, with plots so boldly wrought that each of them can stand alone even when it is stripped of poetry and reduced to the skeleton libretto of an opera.

Yet in the course of the composition of 'King Lear' we see that Shakspere the poet has unceremoniously taken the reins out of the hand of Shakspere the playwright. When we seek an adequate explanation for this unexpected happening we are left to conjecture. Perhaps it may be a symptom of that weariness of constructive labor, and possibly even of the dramatic form with its narrow limitations, which is more or less evident in all the plays composed after 'King Lear.' In the earliest pieces which he wrote we have seen him diligently studying to acquire a mastery of the play-maker's art, experimenting freely, repeating effective devices and improving their effectiveness on repetition. He showed that he had learned how to build a comic plot in the 'Comedy of Errors,' and that he could apply his acquired skill to the handling of a tragic plot in 'Romeo and Juliet.' As we follow his career as a playwright we can discern a steady develop-

ment of his dramaturgic dexterity; and we cannot fail to recognize that this must be due to a constant tension of effort, an eager willingness to take all possible pains to do a good job in the most workmanlike fashion. On the other hand, we cannot fail to find in his latest plays a relaxing of this deliberate effort for excellence in construction and a readiness to rely rather upon his ability to vitalize characters, upon his affluence of purely poetic inspiration and upon his fund of philosophic wisdom. It is as though toward the end of his labors for the stage, when he could not but be conscious of the full maturity of his power as a poet, he had tired of the hard work of construction, which takes time and thought and which can never be left to the inspiration of the moment.

Here it is needful again to call attention to the fact that as there are three periods of his development as a playwright—that of devoted experiment, that of assured mastery and that of relaxed carelessness—so there are three periods of his development as a poet. At first he has little to say for himself; he abounds in the conceits and the figures of speech common to all the Elizabethan sonneteers; he pads out his lines with apt adjectives, and these lines are likely to be more or less self-contained—that is, to have their meaning complete in the single line. At this stage of his growth he is not overburdened with thoughts, and the most obvious qualities of his verse are its cleverness and its brilliancy. He is preëminently an Elizabethan, and, as Matthew Arnold declared, the Elizabethan age, "steeped in humor and fantasticality up to its very lips, newly arrived at the true use of human faculties after their long term of bondage, and delighting to exercise them freely, suffers from its own extravagance in this first exercise of them, can hardly bring itself to see an

object quietly or to describe it temperately." But Shakspere soon outgrows this youthful striving; his imagination expands swiftly and powerfully; his observation supplies him with more cogent figures of speech; his philosophy of life matures; his verse becomes suppler and ampler, running over line after line, often with feminine endings. The meter now marches even with the meaning and constructs the rhythm, because it was always fitted for delivery by the character. Significant as the speeches may be, they are clear to the apprehension of the hearer. They are at once vigorous and melodious; and at his best Shakspere has now that golden perfection of style in which he is unrivaled among English poets. His verse is full but not overflowing, and there is a beautiful equilibrium between thought and phrase. Finally, as he grows in stature and in wisdom, he finds himself with so much to say that he has to compress his message and to charge his words with a weight of meaning, so that his lines become almost harsh at times and crabbed, and on occasion even obscure. His thoughts tumble out so many and so fast that they seem to trip each other up; and sometimes it is only with difficulty that we can follow them as they fall from the lips of the actors.

This is the case not infrequently in 'King Lear'; and it is in this strangely epic drama that Shakspere has most completely displayed his marvelous power as a poet. In this play he has an abundance of passages that move the emotions as keenly as they exercise the intellect; but he has also speeches hard to take in because he has too much matter pressing for utterance. In the full plenitude of his power as a poet and profoundly inspired by the epic appeal of the awful story he was telling, he neglects the noble harmony of thought and expression, as he dis-

regards also the exigencies of the stage. He writes as one carried up into the night by the strong wing of his own soaring imagination and pouring forth his soul not so much for the delight of others, or even for the relief of self-expression, but simply because he must.

CHAPTER XVI

SHAKSPERE AND HIS AUDIENCE

I

"To achieve immortality a work must unite so many excellent qualities that no one can easily seize and appreciate them all," Schopenhauer asserted. "Yet these excellent qualities are always recognized and honored, some by one and some by another. Thus the reputation of the work, esteemed now in this direction and then in that, maintains itself through the long centuries, and in spite of every shifting of interest." And it may be added that the quality most easily seized at first is conformity to the taste and temper of the time and of the place where it was originally produced. By other and more excellent qualities the work must maintain its fame, but in the beginning it wins its reputation because it tickles the likings of its author's immediate contemporaries. Yet their likings may be widely different from ours, and the very qualities which gave the work its earliest vogue may come after a while to obstruct its full appreciation. From this law even the plays of Shakspere are not exempt, and often the characteristics antagonistic to us were precisely those most attractive when they were brought out at the Globe Theater. 'King Lear,' for example, epic as it is in its immensity, and transcending the conditions of actual performance in any theater, Elizabethan or Victorian, is based on the kind of story in which Tudor audiences delighted.

The supreme qualities of Shakspere's major dramas are for all time; but their minor defects, and even not a few deficiencies not fairly to be dismissed as unimportant, are to be ascribed to his desire to give his own audiences what they were accustomed to relish, even if he came in time to give them much beyond the appreciation of the majority of his spectators. This is what Molière did also; although his audience had a higher level of cultivation than Shakspere's he stepped down from the austere gravity of the 'Misanthrope' to the physical humor of Scapin enveloping himself in a sack. Shakspere had to make more frequent and more abundant concessions than Molière because his spectators were ruder, coarser and at times more frankly brutal. Those aspects of his plays which result from his condescension to his public often annoy us now. They have to be explained away; they may have a historic interest for scholars, of course, but for most of us they interfere with the complete enjoyment of a large number of his plays. Much of what was contemporary in Shakspere's work has not infrequently proved to be only temporary in its effect, and therefore discordant with what is perennial in its appeal.

"If any man ever imitated and gave full utterance to the characteristic ideas of his contemporaries it was certainly Shakspere," Sir Leslie Stephen maintained; "and nobody ever accepted more thoroughly the form of art which they worked out"—a form of art that had arisen in response to the preferences of these contemporaries. And elsewhere the same keen critic declared that "every man is an organ of the society in which he has been brought up, since the material upon which he works is the whole complex of conceptions, religious, imaginative and ethical, which forms his mental atmos-

phere." This must be specially the case with the playwright, whose success depends on his pleasing the main body of these contemporaries. Shakspere's contemporaries were, first of all, Englishmen, with their threefold inheritance from the Celts, the Anglo-Saxons and the Latin-Normans. As such they had superabundant energy and soaring imagination, hard heads and thick skins, an intense relish for reality and also a genuine fondness for fantasy. English humor they had also, so different from the humor of every other race, and derived, as M. Jusserand has suggested, from the happy combination of Saxon seriousness with Norman irony.

Then they were Englishmen of a particular time, of the epoch when the British Isles felt the full force of the Renascence which emancipated men's souls from the restrictions of the Middle Ages and which bestowed a large liberty of the mind, often accompanied by a not less welcome license of the body. "There is a certain essence of national meaning, which is as untranslatable as poetry," said Bagehot; and there is also a similar essence of each of the great epochs of human advance. Shakspere's period is the period of Bacon and Raleigh, of Drake and Frobisher, and of the stalwart Elizabeth herself. England had peace and power and plenty, for the royal rule was firmly established and the Armada had been scattered. The Queen might have no possessions on the continent, but she was all the securer in her island realm; and her sturdy subjects were puffed with pride in their newly acknowledged position among the nations of the world. They were ready for reckless enterprises and for daredevil deeds on the chance of profit or of glory. They felt themselves free to attempt anything. "In this outbreak and absence of fetters they resemble thoroughbred horses let loose in the

meadow," so Taine put it; "their inborn instincts have not been tamed nor muzzled nor diminished."

The Tudor Englishman, as he is stripped for our study in the literature, in the letters and in the annals of the time, is seen to be sensuous and sensual, joying in the things of the flesh, yet capable also of appreciating the things of the mind. Eager and enthusiastic, he had a hearty and affluent nature. He scorned premeditation and was swift to act on sudden impulse. He was as furious in hate as love. He was overflowing with animal spirits, more willing to give a blow than to take one and finding unfailing pleasure even in looking on at a fight, whether in the street or the theater. He had no timid shrinking from pain or wounds or death; and he was as ready to bear them himself as to bestow them on others. He was steady of nerve, as became a man who might be thrust into the stocks or made to stand in the pillory to be pelted, who might be branded with hot irons or tortured and disemboweled, who might be hanged, drawn and quartered, who might be burned alive at Smithfield or beheaded on Tower Hill.

Even if he happened to escape any of these pains and penalties himself, he could not avoid being a witness of their infliction upon others. He might take a day off to see a prisoner thrown alive into a boiling caldron; and if he merely took a walk he could not shut his eyes to the score of human heads rotting on the spikes of London Bridge, a sight familiar to every child that crossed the river. And even the children were likely to learn that Elizabeth was so violent in her anger that she boxed the ears of an offending courtier, and that Henry VIII had been so merciless in his vengeance that he gave orders to sack a whole town and to put all the inhabitants to the

sword. Elizabeth was the true child of Henry; and the women of her court were almost as coarse-fibered as the men. They crowded to bull-baitings just as Spanish women still flock to bull-fights. Whipping the blind bear to death was declared to be "a charming entertainment" for ladies. To women as to men insanity was comic, not terrible or pitiful; and on special occasions the madmen were brought out to make sport for invited guests.

II

Such were the Londoners whom Shakspere had to lure into the Globe and to amuse after they had paid their admission into that unroofed area. While there were boxes in the galleries for the few women who were bold enough to adventure themselves in this doubtful company, and while there were three-legged stools on the stage itself for the men about town, the main body of the spectators had to stand in the yard exposed to the inclemency of the weather. These groundlings were a turbulent lot, often apprentices and sailors mixed with the riffraff and rabble of a seaport. They came to the theater after a solid British midday meal; and before the performance, during the intermission and even while the play was going on they talked freely; they cracked nuts and drank beer; they smoked, as men do to-day in the more popular music-halls. They often bandied words with the gallants seated on the stage; and sometimes this interchange of insults led to actual rioting. They insisted on having their own way; and sometimes they compelled the actors to change the program and to perform a different play from that announced at the door.

Such were the spectators Shakspere had to please.

Although they had not the alert intelligence of the Greeks who sat tier on tier on the curving hillside of the Acropolis when the tragedies of Sophocles were performed in the orchestra of the theater of Dionysus as part of a religious ceremony, and although they had not the sturdy sobriety of the burghers of Paris who supported the Palais Royal when Molière was bringing out the best of his incomparable comedies, they were not stupid—far from it. They were eager to be entertained; but they were sluggish of mind and often inattentive. They were unwilling to take trouble and they preferred sign-post directions, and therefore we see the villain setting forth his evil designs frankly in a soliloquy, so that not even the most careless among the audience could mistake him. Violently passionate themselves, they demanded lofty emotion and broad humor. Avid of swift sensation, hot and immediate in its reaction, they wanted strong waters, undiluted and to be gulped down without winking. They did not object to sanguinary brutality or to ferocious cruelty, which responded to their need for constant excitement. They found pleasure in startling contrasts, in unforeseen changes of mood, and even in the transformation of character in the twinkling of an eye. They were glad to have their ears filled with the roar of cannon and to have their eyes entertained by processions and by battles, by haggard witches and by sheeted ghosts with gory throats.

Yet, in spite of their lack of decorum and even of kindly feeling, in spite of their primitive savagery of manners, they responded also to nobler appeals; and as Taine said, "in the theater at this moment their souls were as fresh, as ready to feel everything as the poet was to dare everything." They had their loftier likings as well as their

baser instincts. "Like the people of all nations," as another French historian of English literature says, "they wanted to see on the stage, in more brilliant or repulsive colors, that is to say, in more accentuated hues, what they dimly observed within or around themselves, what they felt but could not express, what they might do but could not tell."

What the spectators wanted to see—this was what the Elizabethan playwrights sought always to supply, Shakspere as well as the rest. He was "a popular playwright," as Professor Bradley asserts, explaining that this means not only that many of Shakspere's plays "were favorites in his day, but that he wrote, mainly at least, for the more popular kind of audience, and that, within certain limits, he conformed to its taste." He utilizes any tale that he happens to lay hands on, regardless of its veracity, or even of its probability, so long as he believes it to be the kind of story that his audience would accept. He inserts numberless fights and battles to gladden their eyes, and he calls to his aid frequent trumpets and occasional cannon to charm their ears. It has been pointed out that in the first part of 'Henry VI' there were represented "a pitched battle of two armies, an attack on a city wall with scaling ladders, two street-scuffles, four single combats, four skirmishes, and seven excursions." These were for sight; and as for sound there were "a dead march, two other marches, three retreats, three sonnets, seven flourishes, eighteen alarums," besides "five directions for drums, one for a horn, and five for soundings, of a kind not specified, by trumpets."

What Shakspere himself thought about the future life and about the supernatural we can only guess, as we can but surmise what his religious views may have been. But

supernatural superstitions were rife among the common people in his day; very likely most of those who gathered in the Globe believed in fairies, pretty certainly they believed in ghosts, and almost unquestionably they believed in witches. That his public was willing to accept these grosser manifestations of the supernatural was warrant enough for Shakspere. So we have fairies in the 'Midsummer Night's Dream' and witches in 'Macbeth.' And ghosts march across the stage, sometimes as single spies and sometimes in battalions. In 'Hamlet' the Ghost is the mainspring of the story; in 'Macbeth' and in 'Julius Cæsar' the ghastly shades of Banquo and of Julius Cæsar appear at crucial moments of the action; and in 'Richard III' the gates of the charnel-house are opened wide for a spectral procession to pass before the startled gaze of the murderer. In both 'Julius Cæsar' and 'Antony and Cleopatra' Shakspere introduces soothsayers, actually possessed of an insight into the future. In the 'Tempest' he creates an impossible being, a missing link between man and beast.

There might be scattered here and there among the audience at the Globe a few who did not hold the prevalent beliefs about disembodied spirits; but the playwright relies rather on the many than on the few. There might also be an occasional spectator who had traveled and acquired wide geographical knowledge by personal experience, yet the immense majority of those in the theater at any performance could know little or nothing about foreign parts. This accounts for the unscholarly inaccuracy of Shakspere's geography. He bestows a seacoast on Bohemia; he accepts Delphi as an island; he credits Bergamo with sailmakers; he raises a beetling cliff on the plain of Elsinore; he confuses distances and localities

in Scotland; he makes Russians suffer from seasickness on their way to Navarre. Here, it is true, he is no more careless of the exact fact than was Æschylus in the 'Prometheus Bound,' where Io describes her wanderings in obvious ignorance of the position of the places where she is supposed to have been. Apparently both the Greek dramatist and the English were content to utilize place-names for their familiarity or for their sonority, with no needless striving for scientific precision.

They may have known better, or they may not. Evidently they held that such slips did not matter, since scarcely one of the spectators was likely to pick them up. One slip that Shakspere makes repeatedly falls into another class; it is a blunder which may very well have been deliberate, and for the benefit of the audience itself. He represents Milan, Mantua and Verona, Rome and Florence, as seaports; and in so doing he may have been sinning against light for what seemed to him a good and sufficient reason. The highways of travel in England in Tudor times were poor, and moreover they were often insecure, so that the customary mode of going anywhere was by sea wherever this was possible. Londoners went by sea to Scotland, no less than to France, and therefore to take ship when the tide served would seem to them the most natural way of getting from one place to another.

III

These evidences of Shakspere's conforming to the general practice of the Elizabethan playwrights must needs be noted, but they are none of them important. In fact, they are external rather than internal. They have to do with the trappings of the play and not with its body or its

soul. And when we insist on a deeper examination into his works, to discover whether he makes concessions of more serious import for the sake of pleasing his spectators, we perceive at once that his pieces do resemble those of his rivals in certain characteristics which we may therefore assume to be grateful to his audience. They are stuffed with surprising adventures startling to the verge of incredibility; they abound in episodes of dark violence and of bloody cruelty; they soar aloft with a spontaneous exuberance which almost touches exaggeration; they often bristle with patriotic speeches, and they are sometimes absurd in their misrepresentation of the national enemy; they are sustained by a profusion of sentiment, of pretty fancies occasionally little better than conceits; they are diversified by frequent comic episodes, generally of a broadly farcical humor, and their dialogue is besprinkled with puns and quibbles even at moments when any playing with words is artistically incongruous.

But have we any grounds for believing that in putting these things into his plays Shakspere was consciously lowering his own artistic standard, and that he descended to these things principally and primarily because of his desire to please the spectators? The question is not easy to answer offhand. These characteristics are not pleasant to us and we should like to think that Shakspere felt about them as we do. We should be glad to believe that he had a keener sense of artistic propriety than these things reveal. Yet we have little warrant for this belief beyond our own inclination. After all, Shakspere was an Elizabethan; he was his own contemporary; and there is no reason to suppose that he did not share the preferences and the prejudices of the majority of his fellow-subjects, however unacceptable these preferences and prejudices may be to us

three centuries later. He was a man of his own time, to whom brutality and cruelty were so familiar as to have bred contempt. He was a right Englishman, glorying in the defiance of all-invading Spain and in the dispersion of its vaunted Armada; and if his praise of England seems a little high-flown, and if his dispraise of her enemies seems a little unworthy of his exalted genius, we have really no right to assume that this was in any way insincere and to suspect that it was merely buncombe and claptrap. The exuberance, the exaggeration, the startling surprises which we find in his plays we can find also in his times; and truth is even stranger than fiction and fiction is ever lagging behind fact.

The frequent farcical scenes, which seem to us almost obtrusive in grave tragedies like 'Romeo and Juliet' and 'Hamlet,' are testimonies to the playful side of his genius, not as valid as the huge figure of Falstaff, but often handled with a joyful gusto only a little inferior to that displayed in 'Henry IV.' If we do not accuse Fielding and Smollett, Thackeray and Dickens, of debasing their art in the desire to win broader popular approbation, when they exult in comic scenes and in comic characters sometimes so highly colored as to be very near caricature, surely we are not justified in bringing the like accusation against Shakspere. Doubtless he knew, as the later English novelists also knew, that these laughter-provoking passages would be popular; but he put them in—or at least most of them—because he enjoyed writing them, and not solely, or even chiefly, because he was responding to the unseen pressure of his audiences.

Even clearer is the case in regard to his puns and his conceits. "Shakspere's indulgence in that lowest form of intellectual depravity, quibbles and plays upon words,

cannot be questioned," Professor Lounsbury admits, adding that "it was the greatest literary vice of his time" and that "several of his greatest contemporaries were addicted to it also. But in an age where most men were vicious he was the most vicious of all." That is to say, Shakspere puns because he likes punning, even if he does it also because it was the fashion of the hour and because it was highly appreciated by his audiences. To us Mark Antony's quibbling with *hart* and *deer* over the body of the Julius Cæsar whom he truly loved seems an example of shocking bad taste. But that Shakspere descended to such quibbles at such a time is his own fault, even if it is in a minor degree the fault of his fellow-subjects. The fondness for the pun merely for its own sake, for playing on the empty word, still survives in Great Britain, although it has never flourished to a like extent in the United States; and here we have another of the differences in taste which now separate the two peoples who have English for their mother-tongue. No British critic can be recalled who has spoken out so boldly against Shakspere's addiction to the quibble as the American whose opinion has just been quoted.

A similar judgment must be rendered in regard to the conceits scattered freely throughout the dialogue of Shakspere's plays. No doubt, his spectators liked flowery language, and the bulk of them lacked the sureness of taste which could distinguish between a barren conceit and a bold stroke of fancy. Here again we can feel sure that Shakspere was pleasing himself at the same time that he was seeking to please the playgoers. Here we have the solid support of his narrative poems, the 'Rape of Lucrece' and 'Venus and Adonis,' which are decorated unnecessarily with mere conceits as hollow as they are frigid.

It was by these poems that Shakspere took rank as a man of letters. His plays he did not care to publish, and they have come down to us almost by accident, with the text in a pitiable condition of uncertainty. But there is no uncertainty in the text of the poems, which Shakspere saw through the press with the utmost regard for accuracy of printing. What we find in these lyric narratives is testimony to Shakspere's own taste, when it was uncontaminated by any possible subservience to the spectators in the theater.

Shakspere has been accused of pandering to the likings of his audience when he puts poetical speeches into the mouths of unpoetic characters; and this has been denounced as unnatural. But this charge is founded on a misunderstanding of the essential principle of the poetic drama, of the convention on which the poetic drama is based. When we go to see a poetic drama we are under an implied contract to let the author depart from the prose of everyday life and to deal with creatures moving in the more ethereal atmosphere of poetry. We agree to allow the poet to bring before us a race of beings whose habitual speech is blank verse and who utter their thoughts with all the richness of expression which metaphor and simile may lend. In like manner when we go to the opera, to the music-drama of Wagner, for example, we must accept the existence of a race of beings whose habitual speech is song, and who, in fact, have no other possible means of self-expression; and when we go to a pantomime we have to admit the possibility of a race of beings whose habitual speech is gesture and gesture alone. This is the condition precedent to any enjoyment of pantomime, of music-drama and of poetic drama.

In Shakspere's comedies and tragedies, even the minor

characters are often as exquisitely poetic in phrase as Shakspere himself. So in Sheridan's comedies, even the minor characters are as elaborately witty as the author himself could be after due deliberation. Sheridan's sense of humor let him make fun of his own practice; and in the 'Critic' he has Mr. Puff declare that he is not in favor of making invidious distinctions and of giving all the fine language only to the better sort of people. Shakspere acted on this principle, and in so doing he is only conforming to the necessary convention of the kind of drama he is composing; and it is beside the question to insist that he is departing from the facts of real life. He is so departing, of course, just as the sculptor departs from the facts of real life when he presents a figure in monochrome, or as the painter when he arrests and fixes the movement of a wave breaking on the beach. In a picture a wave must be motionless and in a statue there can be only the sole color of the material, so in the poetic drama all the characters are properly endowed with the gift of unfailingly poetic speech.

IV

Yet when all is said there are not a few of the passages which we could wish away from Shakspere's plays and which declare themselves as due pretty certainly to the desire to please the baser predilections of his baser spectators. The Elizabethan playwrights catered at once to the loftiest aspirations of their times and to the lowest likings. As Professor Lounsbury expresses it admirably, the drama was lofty for the lofty, "for the pure it was pure, for the vulgar it was vulgar. From this point of view it did not differ essentially from the modern newspaper,

which puts forward the claim sometimes in express words, more frequently in its practice, that within certain limits it must satisfy all classes of the community." And then the critic honestly admits that "the most ardent admirer of Shakspere must concede that he was not wholly free from that tendency to pander at times to man's baser nature, which the Puritans regarded as the inherent vice of all theatrical representation."

It was an indelicate age; and Shakspere now and again lowers himself to regale the dirty-minded with innuendoes that they could roll under their tongues. But he does this far less than most of his rivals; and he confines his dirt to the dialogue. He has very few indelicate situations; and there are few wanton women and few adulterous wives in all his pieces. From his plays the more objectionable passages are generally easy to excise, whereas in Fletcher the very theme of the piece is frequently foul, and proper excision would leave the play bleeding to death. Fletcher seems to have wanted to appeal more particularly to the lewd fellows of the baser sort, whereas Shakspere does not so much write down to the mob as write broad for the crowd, high and low, desiring to make his plays attractive to all classes. He may pander on occasion to the grosser element, whether this was standing in the yard or sitting on the stage; but he is less contaminated by this tendency than any other dramatist of his day, with the possible exception of Ben Jonson, who had a scholarly contempt for the vulgar herd, and who therefore composed his plays to please himself rather than the public—which was therefore less pleased with them. It must be noted to Shakspere's credit that he constantly cleanses the stories he utilizes.

In another way Shakspere is seen to be influenced by

his audience. He counts on the moral callousness of his spectators to enable him to get the happy ending which a comedy demands. He marries off Proteus and Claudio and Angelo to the women who love them and whom they have unpardonably insulted. To us this is revolting; but Shakspere knew that his contemporaries lacked delicacy of feeling. If the spectators could forgive these despicable creatures, it would be on the ground of their own indifference to the dastardly acts of such characters, "because of a moral bluntness, which did not discriminate," as Mr. Robert Bridges suggests, adding that "Shakspere took advantage of this, and where his plot demands a difficult reconciliation, he assumes its possibility, and accomplishes it by a bold stroke, which any manœuvering would have frustrated." That is to say, Shakspere relies on the moral dullness of his audience to make acceptable an undeniable departure from psychologic veracity.

On the other hand, we cannot close our eyes to the evidence which leads us to believe that Shakspere shared this ethical callousness, more or less. It is difficult otherwise to explain Gloster's plain-spoken references within earshot of Edmund to the circumstances of his begetting that illegitimate son. Equally hard to account for on any other hypothesis is Faulconbridge's attitude toward his own illegitimacy, and especially the painful and needless scene in which his mother is made to confess to her son that he is not her husband's child. By any standard of taste these things are execrable; and to-day they grate harshly on our ears, however welcome they may have been to the coarse-grained groundlings of three hundred years ago, or to the equally vulgar-minded courtiers. Other scenes there are, although only a few, which are also

displeasing to us and the blame for which must be divided between Shakspere himself and the men for whom he wrote them.

Perhaps we are a little prone to forget that Shakspere, so high-minded at his best, was also broad-minded, as Molière was. He has the relish for the earthy that we find in Rabelais and in Montaigne. He liked the raw realities of life, and he saw no need to hide this liking, as we are wont to do to-day. He was no Puritan himself, and he was not writing for the Puritans. Indeed, it is one of the disadvantages of the Elizabethan drama that the Puritans kept away from the theater, and thereby deprived the main body of playgoers of the moral leaven that might have helped to raise its tone or at least to have acted as a counterbalancing influence. Already the nonconformist conscience was making itself felt, and it was withdrawing from the theater the more sober and serious element of the English people. It is always bad for the drama when it cannot appeal to the people as a whole, when it strives to attract only certain restricted classes. The full effect of the Puritan withdrawal was not felt until the Restoration, when the comic playwrights were without any restraining influence and when the stage became a moral desert, as though the theater had been erected in one of the cities of the plain, Sodom or Gomorrah. Under Elizabeth, and even under James, the drama did not lower itself to this degraded level. Yet the seeds of the deadly flowers we find in Wycherly and Congreve were sown by Beaumont and Fletcher. Moral callousness, infrequent in Shakspere, is common in many of his contemporaries and blatant in many of his successors.

V

Shakspere was not only deprived of the steadying force which might have been exerted if he had had to reckon with the Puritans as an integral component of his audience, he was also without the support of any competent criticism. Whatever printed discussion of the principles of dramatic art there might be in England in his day was academic; it followed in the footsteps of the Italians of the Renascence, who despised the existing theater which they knew and proclaimed a return to the theater of the Romans and the Athenians, about which their knowledge was inadequate and inaccurate. Jonson agrees with Sidney in thinking scorn of the plays which pleased the people and in pouring contempt upon the dramatic form which had arisen spontaneously on the English stage. Jonson does his best to write his plays in accord with what he believed to be the classical standard; and he was derided when at last he published them as his works. Plays were not works, since they were not reckoned to be literature; rather were they dismissed as a kind of acted journalism, wholly unworthy of critical consideration.

That is to say, there was a total divorce between the theory of the drama and its practice. What the critics discussed was drama of a kind which did not exist in the language, and never was to exist; and the drama which did exist expanded and developed without either help or hindrance from criticism. The playwrights rejected the accepted critical theory and reacted from it. They went on their own way to seek their own salvation in their own fashion. That there were certain obvious advantages in this state of affairs is indisputable. The playwrights could experiment freely without fear of an adverse criti-

cism any more condemnatory than that under which the whole body of their writings already rested. But so large a liberty is rarely wholesome for the practitioners of any art. Furthermore, the absence of any formal dramatic criticism was accompanied by the absence of a critical attitude on the part of the audience. The spectators knew what they liked—but "so do the beasts of the field." In the main the taste of the public was sound, but it was not delicate and it was not discriminating. It enjoyed without knowing or caring why it enjoyed. The playwright could only guess at the gross effect of his work. He had no one to gage what he had done, to weigh it, to measure it, to sift the tares from the wheat.

Shakspere was wholly without the solid support which Molière found in his later years in Boileau, who most approved the most ambitious efforts of his friend, interpreting them to the public and stimulating the playwright to dare his best. In like manner, two centuries later, Sarcey sustained Augier and the younger Dumas; his critical code was mainly deduced from their practice; and he sympathized with their endeavors, acting as an intermediary between them and the public, to whom he suggested the standard by which their works were to be tested. Criticism like Boileau's and Sarcey's is helpful and stimulating; it nerves an author to his utmost endeavor, since he is certain of at least one spectator capable of understanding his aim. Shakspere stood alone, with no single voice to welcome his happiest hits and to warn him when he relaxed his energy or was satisfied with the easy method and the ready-made device. Under these circumstances, the wonder is that he should ever have aspired and attained to the severe beauty of 'Othello' and 'Hamlet.'

CHAPTER XVII

'MACBETH'

I

If 'Macbeth' was written after 'King Lear'—which is believed to be the case, although there is not any certainty about the chronology—then it was the latest of Shakspere's four great tragedies; and in nearly all the plays which he composed afterward there is an evident relaxing of energy, at least in so far as his effort was directed to the preliminary task of plotting. Never again did he get so interested in his theme that he was willing to put forth his full power and to make a play as perfect as he could in construction and in cumulative effort. Thereafter there is an obvious falling off in the care with which he built up his successive scenes into a coherent and compact whole. It is true that his last pieces are as rich in character, in poetry and in wisdom as any that he wrote, perhaps even richer in wisdom; but they are poorer in architectural skill. It is as though his artistic ambition has begun to slacken and as though he feels it no longer worth while to exert his strength to the utmost. It may be that he is wearying of his work and that he is already looking forward longingly to his restful return to his native Stratford. He seems to be willing to conform to the changing preferences of the playgoers and to be ready to give them what they wanted, even if it was not his best. What is good enough for the public

is thereafter to be good enough for him. Why should he trouble any more to frame an artfully articulated plot, when the spectators did not demand it, and when they had no real appreciation of his hidden labor? Here again we may discover the disadvantage due to the absence of any cordial criticism.

In 'Macbeth,' however, there is little premonition of this approaching distaste for the arduous work of construction. Its plotting is careful and conscientious, even if it is not quite as consistent or as skilful as that of 'Othello.' 'Macbeth' is the shortest of all his tragedies, the shortest indeed of all his plays, excepting only the 'Comedy of Errors.' It is only half the length of 'Hamlet' and of 'Antony and Cleopatra.' But it abounds in "business," in stage-effects, which demand a longer time in actual performance than is required by the mere utterance of the words. The witches had many things to do besides the delivery of their message; and the later battles and single combats might fill out the customary period. The brevity of 'Macbeth' is also in accord with the breathless rapidity which Shakspere imparts to the action. The play has the rushing swiftness of the cataract's rapids hurrying resistless to the final fall.

For his story Shakspere goes again to Holinshed. So far as we know, he has not the aid of any earlier piece on the same theme, such as helped him in 'Hamlet.' This is not a little to be wondered at, since the historical narrative contains a complete tragedy almost ready-made to the hand of the playwright. The facts themselves, as Holinshed records them, seem to suggest a tragedy of the Senecan type—that is to say, they present a crime deliberately committed to be ultimately avenged by supernatural aid. And as a result of Shakspere's perception

of the possibilities latent in the pages of the annalist, he is enabled, as Professor Thorndike puts it, to unite "with marvelous dramatic tact the destiny-tragedy of the Greeks with the villain-tragedy of the Elizabethans." 'Macbeth' is therefore, of all Shakspere's tragedies, the one which most closely approximates the Athenian in its swift simplicity of plot and in its acceptance of fate, of a doom due to a supernatural influence on man and felt to be humanly unavoidable. Of course, this parallelism of formula is not intentional on Shakspere's part, and it is brought about only because the theme he chooses here leads him almost necessarily to this conformity with Senecan tragedy.

Holinshed gives us the story of a fierce warrior who rises to the throne through blood, egged on by a clamorous wife and encouraged by the alluring prophecies of wizards and witches. To this throne he has already a claim, and once seated on it he reigns benignantly for ten years, during which prolonged period his wolfish instincts lie dormant. Then most unexpectedly his evil nature wakes again, and he returns to his dark courses, only to be overpowered at last by the antagonism he has aroused. This is the raw material Shakspere works up into dramatic form. He begins by suppressing the ten years of benevolent rule and by making the events follow each other consecutively and without any undramatic lapse of time, during which Macbeth may seem to be other than he is. And he modifies Macbeth from the bloodthirsty adventurer who hews his way to the crown into a worthy soldier seduced into crime by a temptation irresistible at the moment when it presents itself to him. Thus the deeds of the hero-villain are at war with his original character, and Shakspere can show us how the deeds them-

selves bring about the disintegration of the character from its former nobility.

In Holinshed Macbeth has a claim to the crown almost as good as Duncan's, and Duncan is a negligent and cowardly king. Shakspere takes away any pretension that Macbeth might have to the throne while Duncan fills it, and he changes the character of Duncan and makes him a good monarch, trustful, gentle and kindly, beloved by his people. Thus the playwright clarifies the issue and strengthens it. Macbeth is not a cruel and reckless warrior, asserting his own rightful claim to the crown and thrusting aside a king unfit to rule, but a valiant soldier held in high esteem by all, and yet yielding to the temptation to murder a good monarch, that he may seize the scepter for himself. Thus the drama is not a mere external struggle, a fight between two pretenders to the throne; it is internal, since it is waged largely in the soul of Macbeth himself. Macbeth as Shakspere first introduces him is a character to win sympathy; he is a loyal servant of the king; he has just won a victory by his own prowess; he is properly rewarded by promotion. Macbeth does not come before the spectators a villain ready-made, like Richard III, avowing himself, in an opening soliloquy, for the wicked man that he is. It is only in the later scenes, after our interest has been aroused, that we detect the evil ambition which lurks within to destroy him and that we note how the virus of that ambition is working in his veins.

Shakspere adds whatever his own invention may devise; the banquet-scene and the sleep-walking of Lady Macbeth are wholly his, unsupported by any hint in Holinshed; and his is also the use of Macbeth's own castle as the place where Duncan is murdered. He

takes from the annalist only the things he needs for his play; he rolls into one two expeditions or two battles; he transfers deeds from one character to another; and above all, he condenses the duration of time.

II

'Macbeth' is Shakspere's "best acting play," Goethe told Eckermann; "the one in which he shows most understanding of the stage." This is an opinion difficult to admit, in view of the indisputable craftmanship of 'Romeo and Juliet' and 'Othello.' But even if 'Macbeth' may not be superior to these two masterpieces of stage-craft, it is to be ranked with them. Yet M. Maeterlinck denies that it is what the French call "a well-constructed play," and he declares that from the French technical point of view it "hardly seems to be a theatrical piece." The Belgian poet explains its structural defects as due to the fact that it is a dramatic biography, in which the interest cannot increase, as it ought, from act to act, "because the action must perforce follow the life of the hero, and because it is rare for a human life to be disposed of as skilfully as a tragedy." He asserts further that "the culminating point is reached in the last scene but one of the third act," and that what follows, nearly half of the whole, does not regain the level of the earlier portion except in a scene or two, such as the sleep-walking. Yet he admits that "nevertheless it is a masterpiece," and that nowhere else "shall we discover three acts of which the tragic substance is so compact, so gloomily plentiful, so naturally profound."

This last remark is in flat contradiction with the earlier assertion that 'Macbeth' hardly seems to be "a theatrical piece." When we apply to Shakspere's tragedy the tests

by which we discover what the French call "a well-constructed play"—a term which would include the 'Œdipus' of Sophocles, the 'Othello' of Shakspere, the 'Tartuffe' of Molière and the 'Ghosts' of Ibsen—we have no difficulty in perceiving that 'Macbeth' easily attains to this standard up to the middle of the story, or to a little beyond this point. And if we are honest with ourselves, we must confess that the later third of the action is not sustained by an equal expenditure of constructive skill. As so often happens in the Elizabethan drama, the story straggles in the fourth act and the movement is dragging. The interest is retarded, not to say dispersed, by episodes, ably handled in themselves and perhaps not irrelevant, but certainly not dramatically essential. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth disappear while Lady Macduff prattles with her children and while Macduff is told of their taking off. And the touching for the king's evil has as little artistic excuse as the talk about the boy-actors in 'Hamlet.' These scenes claim only a languid attention, while we are eager to follow the fate of Macbeth himself and of his wife. We feel that Shakspere is here momentarily returning to the fragmentary method of the chronicle-play. In the midst of these more or less extraneous episodes we have the marvelous sleep-walking of Lady Macbeth; and in the final passages of the play there is again a sharp tightening of the dramatic intensity.

Thus we see that 'Macbeth' is a well-constructed play except in its fourth act and in part of the fifth. And in its first half its action is built up with a wonderful understanding of theatrical possibilities. Marvelously ingenious as may be the opening scenes of 'Romeo and Juliet,' of 'Hamlet' and of 'Othello,' they do not surpass in theatrical effect the opening scenes of 'Macbeth.' The expo-

sition is highly interesting in itself, theatrically and pictorially, as well as psychologically; and every successive scene prepares for that which follows and awakens increasing expectancy. First, we have only a brief glimpse of the witches; second, we are introduced to the kindly king and we hear the good report of Macbeth's bravery; third, we behold the meeting of Macbeth and Banquo with the witches and we listen to the triple prophecy of Macbeth's future; fourth, we are made spectators of Macbeth's meeting with the king. And then we see Lady Macbeth reading her husband's letter; and her deadly purpose is revealed at once when she learns that the monarch proposes to stay the night with them. Immediately thereafter Macbeth and his wife dally with the fatal temptation. The king is at the gates of their castle; he enters, to be greeted as their honored guest; and at last the charm is wound up.

The murder of Duncan is effected behind closed doors, like the murder of Agamemnon in the tragedy of Æschylus; and it thereby gains a dreadful horror wholly lacking in the later visible assassination of Banquo. It is a deed of darkness done in the night; and Shakspere has never composed a scene fuller of tragic terror than this, with its successive appearances of Macbeth and of Lady Macbeth from the room where the slain monarch lies in his blood. This scene is startlingly interrupted by the knocking at the gate, repeated and prolonged, while the garrulous porter is delaying. The emotional oppression is not broken by this chatter of the porter; in fact, the suspense is in itself most effective in the theater. The spectators wait in wonder to learn who stands at the door and what will follow when the gate is opened at last. It is Macduff who enters—Macduff, the future avenger of the murder; and

he it is who now discovers the assassination. The gray dawn is ushering in a new day; and Macbeth can seize the crown, since Duncan's two sons steal away, under suspicion of parricide.

Although 'Macbeth' is divided into five acts in the First Folio, its story falls into three main divisions, of which the first is now complete—Macbeth has cleared his path to the throne. The second consists of the brief period of his prosperous rule as a king, with the slaying of Banquo and the appearance of Banquo's ghost at the banquet. Then the action wavers a little and hesitates before stiffening itself again to set before us the dread approach of retribution, against which Macbeth makes his last stand, buoyed up by the impossibility of any fulfilment of the two prophecies which seem to protect him. The prophecies are fulfilled, since Birnam Wood is seen coming to Dunsinane and since Macduff was not born of woman. Without hope, as without cowardly shrinking, Macbeth faces Macduff in the final fight. Lady Macbeth has gone before.

Except in some of the episodes intercalated between the second part and the third, the mechanism of the plot is perfect. The construction is in accord with the strictest law of the French, as laid down by Voltaire in the assertion that "every action in tragedy, every scene, ought to serve to tie and to untie the plot; every speech ought to be a preparation or an obstacle." And firmly put together as the story is, it is only a frame for the portrayal of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. It is a story self-sufficient on the stage and yet subordinated to the illumination of the higher truth that character is destiny. The setting of the story is as significant as its structure. Scene after scene takes place at night, or at least in black gloom. Duncan

is murdered after midnight; Banquo's ghost appears at a late banquet; Lady Macbeth walks in her sleep. All is dark, shrouded in mystery, thick with fear, begirt by impending evil. The atmosphere is dense with dismal horror. Omens, portents, prophecies, all call upon the audience to await the dread fulfilment. And the most frequent words in the dialogue are *sleep* and *blood* repeated and insisted upon. There is little pathos and infrequent tenderness. There is no humor, save for a moment when the porter is making ready to unlock the gate; and here it serves only to heighten the suspense of the tragedy. There is no love-making; there are no lighter passages; there is scarcely a single scene bathed in the open sunlight.

Above all, there are the witches, not supernatural themselves, yet gifted with supernatural knowledge because of their unlawful dealings with the powers of evil. They supply the external promptings to the desperate deed Macbeth may have already conceived before he met them, and thus they give him his excuse to himself. These hags are theatrically effective; but they are more than mere theatrical expedients, since they fitly inhabit a play as black as this and as thickly steeped in horror. Part of the abiding popularity of the play is due to Shakspere's adroit use of the supernatural, which has perennial interest, since we are forever wondering about the other world and its possible denizens and their possible communications with us. We need not ask ourselves whether Shakspere himself believes in witches or in ghosts. It is enough for him that his audiences held this belief. He never hesitates to bring on the stage of the Globe a tangible ghost, still gory from his assassination; and he is as ready to present the three weird sisters, whose prediction

came true. In his plays prophecies are always accomplished, curses always work out and presentiments are always justified; to him prophecies, curses and presentiments are dramaturgic devices for arousing attention and exciting expectancy. Theatrical tricks these are, and as such they are welcome to Shakspere; but in 'Macbeth,' at least, he strips them of all their claptrap quality and makes them integral elements of his story, contributing powerfully to the special atmosphere of the play.

III

'Macbeth' has all the stage-effectiveness of a popular melodrama which might rely for success solely upon its plot and upon its picturesque accessories. It is solidly supported by that necessary element of the drama which lies outside literature. In its bare skeleton of action it bears a striking resemblance to 'Richard III,' in that it sets forth the story of a man murdering to gain the throne and then murdering to keep it, until at last he finds himself face to face with the destined avenger, the one man he has not been able to kill out of his way. In 'Macbeth' a prophecy is worked out, and in 'Richard III' it is a curse. In both plays the ghosts of the murdered return to haunt the royal murderers. In fact, it would be possible to set side by side in parallel columns a selection of scenes from the two plays to make manifest their similarity of story. And yet the difference between them is as undeniable as the likeness; and it is due mainly to the difference between Macbeth himself and Richard. Edwin Booth has recorded a remark of Charlotte Cushman's to the effect that "Macbeth was the father of all the Bowery villains." If this had been said of Richard,

there would have been an obvious plausibility in the assertion. Said of Macbeth, it may even be true, if applied merely to the part as that is often performed. But it is false when applied to the character of Macbeth as we find it in Shakspere's text. Richard is little more than the typical stage-villain, a bold, bad man with no hint of goodness in his nature. Macbeth, on the other hand, is potentially a good man, even if he descends at last to almost as many murders as Richard. 'Richard III' is fundamentally a melodrama, whereas 'Macbeth' is a true tragedy, despite its utilization of melodramatic devices.

It is by the superb delineation of the twin heroes, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, that the play is lifted up from the level of 'Richard III.' These two, the fitly mated husband and wife, alone interest Shakspere; and upon them he lavishes his utmost care. The other characters are more or less neglected; they are sketched in outline only. Pale as they may be, they are never dramaturgically feeble, since they are sturdy of will; Banquo and Macduff, for example, are as determined each in his own way as Lady Macbeth herself. These less important characters are endowed with adequate vitality for their subordinate position; they are as alive as they need to be to fulfil their purpose in the play, wherein they are but pawns, or at best knights and bishops, to be taken by the king and the queen.

Macbeth has the abundant energy which holds our interest in the theater; and he is not inferior to Richard III in ruthless determination. We follow the successive stages of his self-degradation. Sin begets sin; and Macbeth goes from bad to worse, until the bold soldier of the opening episodes, proud of his prowess, peremptory

and impatient, self-assertive and longing for command, tries in vain to conquer his conscience as he displays his indurated wickedness. And at the end we behold him involved in a nightmare of dreadful doubt, driven along by a vehement frenzy, with his brain unsettled even if he is less than half insane. Yet he never descends to cowardice, shattered as his nerves are and dominated as he may be by superstition. He is alert of intelligence and strong of will to face foes and to withstand dangers, even if he is possessed by doubts due largely to his ever-active imagination. Macbeth's imagination is superior to his self-control; he can see before and after; and this power of vision redoubles his sufferings. He knows the better way, even if he has chosen the evil path; and he is poignantly conscious of the disintegration of his better nature. It is due to his imagination that he is continually gnawed by remorse.

Lady Macbeth is devoid of imagination, and therefore she is never bitten by conscience. She treads the road she has chosen without looking back. She is matter-of-fact, and for her the unknown has no terrors. She has a hard cruelty, due to her insensibility. She has no repentance in her, no regret, although her dreams are troubled and she walks in her sleep, wondering that the old man should have had so much blood in him. Her courage is as undaunted as her husband's; and in her case this is rooted in her deficiency of imagination, even if it is also strengthened, as has been suggested, "by a certain obtuseness of the nervous system" very unusual in women and not common in men. She is the better man of the two, the more resolute and the more relentless. Her ambition it is which arouses the ambition of her husband and which makes them partners in crime. Her

determination is as indomitable as his; and she is by nature even fiercer and more tigerish than her mate. They are twin hero-villains who fascinate us while we abhor them, and who have a stern persistence in evil that we cannot despise even while we detest.

Mrs. Siddons, the most famous impersonator of Lady Macbeth, held that she was a fragile woman, slight and blonde. This is supported by only one word in the text—Lady Macbeth's reference to "this little hand"—and it is fanciful because it imputes to Shakspere a habit of visualizing his characters independent of the actors for whom they were severally composed. The novelist sees his creatures tall or short, dark or fair, and he describes them for his readers; but the dramatist is generally careful to avoid any ascription of physical peculiarities which might not be in accord with those of the performers who undertake the parts. If Lady Macbeth calls her hand "little," this does not prove that Shakspere thought of her as a little woman; it may be evidence only that the boy-actor for whom the part was composed had a small hand. This boy-actor was probably the lad who had already proved his quality by the impersonation of Regan; and it is likely that a little later he was intrusted with Hermione in the 'Winter's Tale.' The other boy-actor, who had created Cordelia, may have appeared as Lady Macduff, as he may have appeared later as Perdita and as Miranda in the less tragic plays that Shakspere was to compose in swift succession. Macbeth, of course, was undertaken by Burbage, while Macduff would fall to the lot of the actor who had already performed Richmond and Laertes.

IV

Stripped bare, the skeleton of 'Macbeth' is melodrama, and the play is lifted to the higher plane of tragedy because of the largeness and veracity of its two hero-villains. Shakspere sustains the tragedy by his own philosophic superiority to his characters. He sees his creatures, as they are and he stands outside them and above them. He uses them to illustrate the laws of life, and he makes us pity them because he makes us understand them. This philosophic pity, so it has been aptly put, "is what distinguishes tragedy from melodrama, giving it a beauty that is not sentimental and a significance independent of theatrical effectiveness." Shakspere points no moral and he puts into the play no personage to utter his own opinions; yet the ultimate morality is visible enough. Though the play is larger than life, we cannot fail to find in it the abiding truth of life itself.

'Macbeth' tells to every human soul the story of that soul's own experience, rendered more impressive by the poetry in which it is uttered; and therefore Fanny Kemble asserted that "it is the truth itself, and not the form in which it is presented, which makes the force of its appeal." Then she pointed out the appalling veracity with which the insidious approach of temptation is represented—"its imperceptible advance, its gradual progress, its clinging pertinacity, its marring importunity, its prevailing fascination, its bewildering sophistry, its pitiless tenacity, its imperious tyranny, and its final hideous triumph over the moral sense." Macbeth himself is subdued to what he works in, and he is never conscious of the fateful web in which he is enmeshed. But Shakspere remains outside

of his play; he sees what is hidden from Macbeth and he makes us see it.

And yet he accomplishes this marvel by magical means, intangible and invisible, since there is in the play itself no declaration of his purpose. As Maeterlinck reminds us, "Macbeth and his wife never give utterance to a lofty or simply remarkable thought, express no noble or merely sentimental sentiment; and the poet, on his side, allows himself no psychological explanation, no moral reflection. And yet a somber and sovran beauty, a mysterious and as it were an immemorial dignity, a grandeur not heroic and superhuman, but older, it seems, and profounder than that which we know, environ and imbue the whole drama." A little later in the same criticism Maeterlinck finds that a part of the inexplicable power of the play springs from the host of images which give vitality to the dialogue. No one of Shakspere's heroes is more richly endowed than Macbeth with the gift of simile and metaphor, with the power of imaginative expression. His imagination is but the natural accompaniment of his essential energy; and even Hamlet, though he is more prone to moralize and to philosophize, is not more truly a poet in his speech than Macbeth. What Hamlet dilutes in a soliloquy Macbeth compresses into a phrase pregnant with meaning and noble with poetry. Nowhere in 'Macbeth' do we detect any self-conscious delight in playing with words for the beauty of their sound or the charm of their color. There are no flowers of speech plucked for their own sake. Poetry is now no longer a mere accomplishment; it is the implement of the playwright, the weapon of the dramatist. There are few long speeches, but the single lines flash out, keen as a sword from the scabbard. There is little that lends itself to detached delivery, like the solilo-

quies of Hamlet, the deliverances of Jaques, or the orations of Brutus and Mark Antony. The speeches exist only for the sake of the play, and they cannot be snatched from the mouth of the character who utters them at a special moment in the progress of the piece. They are poetry, but they are drama also; and in no other tragedy of Shakspere has he so absolutely disclosed his possession of the double qualification demanded from the dramatic poet. Not only are these sharp and glittering lines pertinent to the situation and to the person, they are also unadorned and simple almost to the verge of bareness. What could be more compact in itself or more weighty in content than this? "The raven himself is hoarse that croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan under my battlements."

What could be more imaginatively intense than Macduff's despairing cry? "He has no children!"

This imaginative intensity of the poetry is accompanied by a diminution in the frequency of the riming couplets, which are almost altogether absent. When they chance to occur they serve only to heighten an exit-speech; that is to say, rime is used here only for emphasis and solely for the benefit of the actor.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DRAMATIC-ROMANCES

I

'MACBETH' was the latest of Shakspere's major tragedies; and only one of the plays he was to write thereafter, the ever-delightful 'Tempest,' is really worthy of his reputation. His more important work was accomplished and his ambition seems to have slackened. It may be that he was acutely conscious of the changing taste of the playgoing public, which was steadily losing its relish for idealism and which was displaying already the liking for coarser fare that was to stain the stage of the Restoration. New men were coming forward as playwrights, men who belonged to the younger generation and who could, therefore, reflect its likings without effort. In the twenty years of Shakspere's strenuous productivity the writers he had found in possession of the stage had disappeared. Gone were Marlowe and Lyly, Greene and Peele and Kyd. Ben Jonson had shouldered his way forward; Beaumont and Fletcher had begun the series of pieces which Fletcher was to continue with other collaborators after Beaumont had retired from active work. In the half-dozen of their plays produced by Shakspere's own company, the two young partners had elaborated a new type of play—the type which has been called the dramatic-romance. The germ of the dramatic-romance may be found in Shakspere's own romantic-comedies and also in his somber tragi-comedies, in which situations of a tragic possibility

are given a happy ending. As Professor Bradley has asserted, the story of these Elizabethan plays "was intended to be strange and wonderful"; they were designed as "tales of romance dramatized, and they were meant in part to satisfy the same love of wonder to which the romance appealed."

But Beaumont and Fletcher went far beyond Shakspere in their search for the romantic. Their pieces take place in a realm of unreality, where the unexpected always happens, and where the expected rarely comes to pass. Characters are suddenly transformed; they change color while we are watching them; they do instantly the very thing they have declared that they would never do. Consistency is constantly sacrificed to immediate effect. Striking situations are obtained only by ignoring the elementary facts of human nature; and these striking situations are heaped up lavishly and tumultuously until the spectator is left gasping from the effort to keep abreast of the playwright. Everything is sudden and startling; motives flame up and die down in the course of a single scene; there is no attempt at plausibility, still less is there any pretense of probability. Indeed, the authors seem to prefer the improbable as the more surprising and, therefore, as the more effective on the stage, where strangeness was attractive in itself. Situations and characters alike are intensified, exaggerated, carried to extremes, without regard to verisimilitude or propriety.

Professor Thorndike has acutely analyzed the dramaturgic method of Beaumont and Fletcher as displayed in their earlier dramatic-romance. "They sought to present a series of situations, each of which should be interesting of itself and should contrast with its neighbors, and all of which should combine sufficiently to lead up to a

startlingly theatrical climax. There is nothing epical about their construction; it is not truly dramatic like that of Shakspere's tragedies where the action is in part developed from character." They tried to contrast as many varying emotions as possible. "They never strove to keep on one emotional key; they sought for an emotional medley." In other words, they were deliberately sacrificing the truly dramatic to the merely theatric; and by so doing they succeeded in pleasing the more degenerate taste of Jacobean playgoers.

'Philaster' is perhaps the most typical of these dramatic-romances; yet there is a certain uniformity of plot in most of them. "A story of pure, sentimental love is always given great prominence," says Professor Thorndike, "and this is always contrasted with a story of gross sensual passion. The complications arising from this favorite contrast of love and lust give an opportunity for all kinds of incidents involving jealousy, treachery, intrigue, adultery and murder. Each play has its idyllic scene in which the pure and love-lorn maiden plays her part, and each play abounds in broils and attempted seductions and assassinations. While all this commotion is being aroused in the passions of individuals, thrones are tottering and revolutions brewing." And incidentally purely spectacular features are introduced now and again, especially dances, borrowed from the court-masks.

To this type of dramatic-romance, invented by Beaumont and Fletcher, belong the last three pieces which Shakspere composed without the assistance of any collaborator. Two of them, 'Cymbeline' and the 'Winter's Tale,' fall well within the definition of the type; and the third, the 'Tempest', while it conforms less strictly, con-

tains not a few of the essential elements of the dramatic-romance. We need not wonder that Shakspere was willing to take over a type of play developed by younger authors, who were his friends, who were writing for the company to which he belonged, and with one of whom he was soon to collaborate. He had never sought for originality of form; he had willingly accepted the framework of the chronicle-play from Marlowe and the formula of the tragedy-of-blood from Kyd. He had used the pattern of Lyly in one early comedy, and he had borrowed the method of Greene for another. He was singularly susceptible to the prevailing influences of the playhouse; and it was natural enough that he should avail himself of the new type, the theatrical effectiveness of which must have been immediately evident to him as an actual actor in the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher.

It may seem at first sight a little surprising that an elder playwright should thus be willing to avail himself of the labor of younger and less important poets. But there is no difficulty in showing that there are not a few precedents for this in the history of the drama. In the later tragedies of Æschylus, for example, we can easily discover the willingness of the older poet to profit by the dramatic improvements due to the younger Sophocles; and it is not difficult to detect in certain of the final tragedies of Corneille, in his 'Suréna' more especially, the influence of Racine, and a readiness on the part of the aging dramatist to adopt the devices which had captivated the spectators of the 'Iphigénie' of his youthful rival.

II

Of the three dramatic-romances that Shakspere composed in imitation of Beaumont and Fletcher, 'Cymbeline' is the one which most emphatically conforms to the type as this had been worked out by the younger playwrights. It has the merits and the demerits inherent in the formula. It contains a laboriously complicated story abounding in surprises and barren of reality. It is as artificial as the 'Philaster' of Beaumont and Fletcher, which indeed seems to have served as its immediate pattern. It proves that Shakspere could be on occasion quite as ingeniously clever as the youthful collaborators whom he was emulating. It lacks the largeness of his great tragedies as it is devoid of the charm of his romantic-comedies. It contains no character, with the single exception of its lovely heroine, Imogen, who has won a place in the gallery of Shakspere's imperishable figures. Whatever its success when it was originally performed, it has been unable to keep itself on the stage, where it is seen now only at rare intervals and only because some actress of authority wishes to risk herself in the alluring part of Imogen.

Of course the play is Shakspere's, after all is said, and there are many passages that only Shakspere could have written. When he composed this piece he was at his full maturity as a poet, and his wisdom also had ripened to enrich the dialogue of this arbitrary tale. There is no falling off here on the part of the poet or of the philosopher, even if there is a sad decline in the psychologist and the playwright. It is astounding that after the ample creation of character which compels our admiration in the great tragedies he should have been satisfied with the summary

and perfunctory outlining which we discover in the persons who carry on this dramatic-romance. Here he is vying with the inventors of the type, and he outdoes them in reckless disregard of plausibility and of probability. The characters have no independent life; they are the slaves of the situation. What they say and what they do is rarely what they would say or do of their own volition; it is only what they have to say and do to make the plot work and to bring about the successive surprises.

And the decline in playmaking skill is equally evident. The play is full of feeble devices and of clumsy makeshifts of a simplicity which Shakspere had long outgrown and which he had discarded in his nobler plays, both tragic and comic. The exposition is pitiably ineffective when compared with the superb openings of 'Romeo and Juliet' and 'Hamlet,' of 'Othello' and 'Macbeth.' Shakspere sends on two gentlemen, that one of them may tell the audience what the other can hardly fail to know already. In like manner Belarius has a long soliloquy, wholly without excuse, and delivered solely to inform the spectators who he is himself and who are the two young men who think themselves his sons. The last dying speech and confession of the Queen is absurdly out of nature; and it is reported to us only to clear the way for the quick sequence of marvelous discoveries and recognitions which tumble over each other in the final scene. The whole plot has been articulated to lead up to these discoveries and recognitions, which come one after another with impossible rapidity. But despite all the care and trouble which has been spent on this arbitrary construction, the resulting scene is quite ineffective in the acting, for the plain reason that the discoveries and recognitions are astonishing only to the characters in the story, since

they reveal nothing which the spectators do not know already. There is no element of expectancy or of suspense in the protracted series of situations. The audience has long foreseen how the play would end—indeed, how it had to end; and there is too little interest in any of the characters, excepting always Imogen, too little reality in the tale itself, to make the spectators care how the persons in the play will take the strange news which is revealed to them by character after character.

In fact, most modern playgoers would be inclined to echo Matthew Arnold's remark after he had attended a performance of 'Cymbeline.' The British critic admitted the charm of Imogen, of course; but he found the play itself "such an odd, broken-backed sort of thing; it could not have happened anywhere, you know." The very skill with which Shakspere adjusts his story to the likings of the Jacobean audiences, whom Beaumont and Fletcher had accustomed to fantastic impossibility, has recoiled on him and made the piece repugnant to us nowadays. Especially repulsive to us is the main theme of the story, the monstrous wager which the husband makes with a casual stranger about his wife's chastity. Such an outrageous bet was all very well in the source where Shakspere found it; and it might have been possible enough in the Renascence Italy of Boccaccio. But its abhorrent grossness is inconceivable under the circumstances in which Shakspere presents it. There is an almost equal lack of truth in the interview between the would-be seducer and Imogen. Coming with a letter of introduction from her husband, Iachimo proceeds at once to take away the character of Posthumus and to make love to Imogen. The psychology of the seducer is so summary here that it may fairly be called childish.

Even Imogen herself, who has found favor in the eyes of many dissatisfied with the play itself, is less subtly and less ingeniously presented than her sisters in the earlier romantic-comedies. Swinburne has called her "the woman best beloved in all the world of song"; and yet in what she actually does before our eyes she is far inferior in vibrating femininity to Juliet and to Viola. She does and she says little more than what she is commanded to say and to do by the circumstances of the story of which she is the heroine. She is painted for us, and her character is delineated largely by what the other characters say about her, and only a little by what she says herself. Imogen is described rather than self-revealed, whereas Viola and Juliet are self-revealed rather than described. Viola and Juliet need no eulogy from the other characters and no commentary; they are what they are, and we know them by their own words and deeds. Here again Shakspere is obeying his pattern; he is surrendering his own sounder method of portraiture for the unsound method brought into fashion by Beaumont and Fletcher.

III

In its external trappings the 'Winter's Tale' adheres closely to the formula of the dramatic-romance. It is even more "broken-backed" than 'Cymbeline,' since there is a gap of sixteen years between the third act and the fourth. It has the same lack of emotional unity and it displays the same effort to accumulate disparate emotions and to mingle scenes of jealous rage with scenes of idyllic love-making. There is an even more obvious endeavor to relieve the action with extraneous spectacular effects: the bear which chases Antigonus off the stage, the grotesque

dance of the twelve satyrs, the more graceful revels of the shepherds and shepherdesses, and finally the picturesque bringing to life of the statue of Hermione—all deliberately designed to gratify the craving for pictorial novelty which had become a marked characteristic of Jacobean audiences. And in the final scene there is again a series of discoveries and recognitions, although in the 'Winter's Tale' they are more effective than in 'Cymbeline,' as well as less artificially brought about. At least one of them is still effective in the theater, the return to life of Hermione. As Shakspere has carefully kept the audience in ignorance of her survival, there is a shock of surprise when the seeming statue starts to life and steps down from the pedestal. This clever effect gives to the final episode of the 'Winter's Tale' a vitality which has now departed wholly from the final episode of 'Cymbeline.'

The story is quite as abnormal and as far-fetched, but it has nothing quite as inacceptable as the wager of Posthumus. The hot jealousy of Leontes is as impossible as anything in the preceding play; and it is matched in violence by the brutal attitude of Polixenes to his son. Yet on the whole the 'Winter's Tale' is a far better piece of work than 'Cymbeline.' It has the full flavor of the dramatic-romance, yet its story is not so artificially involved. Its plot is simpler and clearer in the performance, and more appealing, in spite of the arbitrariness of the motiveless jealousy which is the mainspring of the machinery. It is freer in its composition and less obviously copied from the model set by Beaumont and Fletcher. One might even venture the suggestion that Shakspere, having mastered the formula of the dramatic-romance, feels at liberty now to employ it in his own fashion. One evidence in support of this is the fact that

certain of the characters exist apart from the situations and have an independent life of their own, like the major characters in Shakspere's greater plays. It is true that Leontes and Polixenes are only what the plot permits them to be, and that even Hermione is not truly consistent. Her noble eloquence in the trial scene does not proceed from the mouth of the same woman whose witty banter has enlivened the opening episodes. Frankly unfeminine also is the forgiveness of her husband without one word of reproach, although his atrocious conduct has caused the death of her only son, the supposed death also of her only daughter, and her own seclusion for sixteen years.

But not a few of the other characters in the 'Winter's Tale' have a vitality and a veracity lacking to the persons who carry on the plot of 'Cymbeline.' Paulina is alive and human and womanly, both in her devotion to her royal mistress and in her frank scolding of her royal master. She plays her part, urged by her own individuality, and she is not the mere creature of the story, a puppet pulled to and fro by the playwright to compel the forward movement of the plot. And that friendly rascal, Autolycus, is a truly comic character, as rich in humor as Bottom or Dogberry (and probably written to be acted by the same performer, Armin). He is an unscrupulous creature—a gay thief, with a light heart as well as a light hand—a wily rogue, with a sense of humor; and all the scenes in which he appears ring true. The second low-comedy part, the old shepherd's son, is inferior only to Autolycus. In the First Folio he is called frankly the "clown," but he is not merely a part; he is a character.

Then, above all, there is unstrained romance in the young lovers who captivate us in the last two acts.

Florizel is the king's son who loves the shepherd's daughter and who holds the world well lost so that she is his. Perdita is the eternal maid, giving herself at once and wholly to the youth who woos her, knowing little about him, except that he loves her and that she loves him, and caring less. The spectators are aware that she is of royal birth, and therefore a proper bride for her princely wooer; so the audience follows the course of true love when it fails to run smooth, sure that it runs deep and certain that it will bear them at last into the haven of happiness. There is the perennial charm of a spring idyl in this meeting and mating of Florizel and Perdita. Shakspere may have introduced them in accord with his pattern, to follow the practice of Beaumont and Fletcher in mingling the gentler emotions with the more violent. But whatever his motive, his imagination kindled when he came to compose these scenes, and he makes the young couple an example of young love triumphant over every obstacle.

Florizel may be only what he has to be, an ardent lover, reckless of all but his love, but Perdita is more than the story requires. She is one of Shakspere's most enchanting heroines. She may be belauded by other characters in the play and her beauty may be praised by all who gaze upon it. But she is not dependent for her charm upon any eulogy from others. She speaks for herself; she is what she is; she is a vision of joy steeped in poetry, a creature of the springtime of life, an ideal of ineffable maidenhood, "standing with reluctant feet, where the brook and river meet." Her vocabulary, her delicacy of speech, her delicacy of sentiment, may be out of keeping in a girl who has been brought up as a shepherd's daughter. But the spectators know her for a

king's daughter; and the poetry that falls from her lovely lips is so exquisite that we are prompt to suppress all protest. Less amply developed than Rosalind or Viola, Perdita is no less true to the eternal womanly. She shares their grace and their charm; and the scenes in which she appears, even if more carelessly composed, are worthy of comparison with the scenes in which Rosalind and Viola take part. They are all three creatures of exquisite fancy; and the last of them proves that Shakspere's hand had lost nothing of its cunning in the years that had lapsed. That she falls from grace once in the course of the play, and is ready to desert her supposed father in callous unconcern at the moment when his life is threatened—this is only what one must expect in a dramatic-romance. She is lucky that she is compelled only once to lapse from the standard of conduct which our sterner modern taste imposes even upon the most romantic heroine.

IV

The 'Tempest' is believed to be the last play that Shakspere wrote; and it is certainly the latest of his three dramatic-romances. A dramatic-romance it is in its atmosphere and in the conduct of its plot; but here Shakspere utilizes the framework of that type to achieve a beauty all his own. Externally, in the artificial structure of its story, it may be only a dramatic-romance, but internally it is the most enchanting of fairy-tales. Where 'Cymbeline' and the 'Winter's Tale' frequently affront our common sense, the 'Tempest' wins instant acceptance since its fantastic misadventures are due to the actions of a magician and of his attendant spirit and are

thereby furnished with a logical cause. Here we have added evidence of the truth of Aristotle's assertion that probable impossibilities are more acceptable than improbable possibilities. The play is what the French call a *féerie*, a theatrical type of which the latest poetic example is the 'Blue Bird.' It has the simplicity, the naïveté, the child's point of view with its easy welcome for the marvels of magic. Shakspere is again drawing upon folklore; and in the 'Tempest,' he utilizes effects already approved in a 'Midsummer Night's Dream.' Ariel is own brother to Puck, the Ariel whom Prospero released from his long imprisonment in a pine-tree. Ariel attires himself as a watery nymph to go invisible, and Prospero's weird powers can be exercised only when he dons his conjuring mantle. These outward and visible signs were helpful to the spectators, whose taste in sorcery was as primitive as when Marlowe had made Doctor Faustus perform his marvels and when Greene had displayed Friar Bacon as a conjurer of equally restricted imagination. The wonders worked by Prospero's art are obvious enough, and therefore the better fitted to the understanding of the Jacobean audience.

Miranda is the true heroine of a fairy-tale and Ferdinand is the true prince who comes to woo her in the enchanted isle. These two parts were plainly prepared for the two performers who had undertaken Perdita and Florizel. But Shakspere is now far more interested in his work. His writing is spontaneous, even if his plotting is a little labored. He creates characters with his old gusto and with all his old understanding of human nature. It is true that there is a usurping brother of the rightful ruler, a figure of little more validity than his predecessor in 'As you Like it,' and also that one moment Antonio proposes to murder Alonzo, and at another Caliban pro-

poses to murder Prospero, because even a fairy-tale, if it is also a dramatic-romance, must be heightened by the danger of death, although the spectators always know the play to be a comedy and, therefore, refuse to take these tragic perils seriously. Most of the characters have more veracity than those of the 'Winter's Tale,' as that in its turn in this respect excelled 'Cymbeline'; they are more recognizable human beings; they are created with not a little of the fresh energy of portraiture that ravishes our admiration in the great tragedies and the great comedies. The comic group, especially Stephano and Trinculo, are humorously realized and they are not mere clowns; and Caliban, the misbegotten son of a witch, is one of Shakspere's most powerful creations, half-human and half-beast, an amazing projection of man's lower nature, at once amusing in his simplicity and appalling in his significance.

It is always dangerous to discover the dramatist in any of his characters, yet there is a strong temptation to perceive in Prospero something of Shakspere himself, of his detached wisdom in his later years, just as we thought we caught a hint of him earlier in the hot ardor of young Romeo and again in his manly maturity in the questioning philosophy of Hamlet. And Shakspere has here given us an added proof of his belief that women are swift to fall in love at first sight and frank in making advances to the lover thus distinguished. Miranda is as void of coquetry as Juliet or Rosalind or Viola and as innocent in confessing her state of heart. She has scarcely seen Ferdinand before she accepts him as her destined mate:

> My affections
> Are then most humble. I have no ambition
> To see a goodlier man.

She is compounded of purity and grace and charm, and it is no wonder that Ferdinand is taken captive by her instantly. She is the sleeping-beauty of the fairy-tale in an enchanted island instead of an enchanted castle, and he is the prince who comes to wake her to life with a kiss. We have never a doubt that they will live happy ever after, as all the loving young couples are wont to do in all the other fairy-tales.

Shakspere composes his play in full accord with the requirements of the dramatic-romance, not only in the idyllic love-scenes and in the moving accidents of flood and field, but also in the abundance of purely spectacular elements taken over bodily from the court-masks and yet here justified by the atmosphere of fairy-land in which the whole story of the 'Tempest' is adroitly involved. There is the magical banquet brought in by strange shapes dancing with salutations, and the dishes of this repast disappear with "a quaint device," whereupon the strange shapes dance again with mocks and mows. There is the very mask-like interlude of the three goddesses, Iris and Ceres and descending Juno. There is the dance of the nymphs and reapers, to match the revels of the shepherds and shepherdesses in the preceding play, but not here quite as logically related to the situation. There is the noise of hunters followed by the pack of dogs and hounds which chase the distracted and befuddled Trinculo and Stephano and Caliban. There is at the end the magic circle into which Prospero conjures his enemies and all the rest of the ship's crew, so that this piece may also have its proper series of discoveries and recognitions.

The structure of the fairy-play as a whole is a little straggling, even if its movement is fairly straightforward; its several contrasting groups are kept fairly well in hand.

Its action is not in the least broken-backed, like those of 'Cymbeline' and the 'Winter's Tale.' The opening scene of the shipwreck is picturesque in itself, and it strikes the key-note of the strange tale that is to follow. Immediately after it comes the scene in which Prospero expounds the situation to Miranda. Prospero's explanation is for the benefit of the audience, of course, and it is a simple enough form of exposition; but it is not out of nature, since Prospero had to tell Miranda sooner or later, and he had good reason for postponing his narrative until it was necessary. And what Prospero tells Miranda arouses in the audience the interest of expectancy, since the spectators have seen the shipwreck and are ready for the arrival of the passengers, to see what will happen when the usurper lands on the isle of mystery.

One remarkable peculiarity of the 'Tempest' remains to be noted. The supersubtle Italian critics of the Renascence had evolved, partly from their misreading of Aristotle and their misunderstanding of the Greek tragedians, but mainly from their own inner consciousness, what is known as the doctrine of the three unities—of action, time and place. They asserted that every self-respecting play should have only a single action, that its action should begin and be completed in a single day, and that this action should be confined to a single place. Logically they should have insisted upon a single spot, but they did not. To them a single place might be a palace, a town or an island; and the action, so long as it was restricted to this place, might be in different parts of it. Ben Jonson, for example, was a tenacious stickler for the rules laid down by the Italian theorists, and he boasted frequently that he had observed them strictly, yet in 'Every Man in His Humour' his story takes us to different parts of London,

and evidently in his mind London was only a single place, having sufficient unity to keep him within the law. As the doctrine of unities was strenuously set forth by Sidney long before Shakspere began to write plays, and as Shakspere was an intimate of Jonson himself, it is inconceivable that he should have been ignorant of the theory. Yet he always refused to accept it in his plays, perhaps because he saw no profit in imposing any fetters upon himself, perhaps because he knew that his audiences did not care whether he conformed or not, and perhaps because he saw the mighty advantage his freedom gave him, in that the lengthening of the duration of the story allowed him to show character in process of change, of growth toward higher things or of disintegration toward lower.

Now, however, in the 'Tempest,' at the very end of his career as a playwright, as also in the 'Comedy of Errors,' at the very beginning, Shakspere observes the three unities. He gives us a single action happening in a single day and confined to a single place. In the case of the 'Comedy of Errors' this conformity to the rule may have been accidental, due to his use as a source of a Latin play on which the unities were already preserved. But in the case of the 'Tempest' his obedience to the Italian code is plainly intentional. The scene, though it shifts, never departs from the isle and the adjacent waters thereof; and the passage of time is dwelt upon more than once, so as to call our attention emphatically to the fact that the tale is told within less than twelve hours. This is the more surprising, since Shakspere had never more boldly violated the so-called unity of time than in the immediately preceding play, in which the story stretches over sixteen years, in total disregard of the anticipatory animadversions of Sidney. The obvious explanation is that Shakspere in

this his last play amuses himself by showing that there is really no great difficulty in obeying the behests of the Italian theorists, even if he does not hold himself always bound to obedience, and that he can do it as easily as Ben Jonson—more easily even, since he does not allow his self-imposed restrictions to hamper his liberty. Whatever his motive, he plainly proves that it was possible to compose a piece in which the pseudo-rules are followed, and in which this servility to the theorists is not allowed to spoil the play. He is here free from the reproach which a French critic urged when he declared that he did not blame a certain dramatist for following rules, but he did blame the rules for causing that dramatist to write a bad play.

CHAPTER XIX

THE PLAYS IN COLLABORATION

I

There are four of the later plays attributed to Shakspere which are not wholly his and in which we detect the work of another hand. Two of these, 'Timon of Athens' and 'Henry VIII,' appeared in the First Folio, published only seven years after his death by his theatrical comrades Heming and Condell. 'Pericles' was not included in this collection; indeed, it gained admittance only after the lapse of many years. And the fourth of these plays, the 'Two Noble Kinsmen,' has never been formally accepted as Shakspere's work, although many competent critics now believe that he was one of its authors and that his share in it may be as large as his share in 'Pericles.' It was first printed by itself in 1634, ascribed to Fletcher and Shakspere; but it did not appear in the first edition of Beaumont and Fletcher, issued in 1647.

Since these four plays are not wholly Shakspere's own work, they must be the result of some sort of collaboration, of a literary alliance of one kind or another, wherein he was one of the partners. But the more carefully the plays are considered the more evident it is that they are not all four due to the same method of collaboration. There are, in fact, two distinct kinds of literary partnership, both of them being carelessly called collaboration. First of all, there is the true collaboration, that of Erckmann-Chatrian and of Augier and Sandeau, in which the

pair of authors really labor in common, inventing and creating in consultation. They make the plot together, they develop the characters, and they assign to one another the more mechanical task of the actual writing. Then there is a second kind of collaboration, falsely so called, in which the two writers do not consult, and may not even meet for consultation, but in which one of them merely revises or amplifies or modifies what the other has already written, and in this case there is not a genuine partnership. And under these circumstances it is sometimes possible to separate the respective shares of the two writers and to identify what the reviser has added to the work of the inventor. He may have made it better or he may have made it worse, but in neither case did he create it originally. There has been only a mechanical mixture of their several contributions and not a chemical union. But in a true collaboration there is a chemical union of the several contributions, and this forbids any successful effort to identify the respective shares of the several collaborators. At most we may guess that this passage or that is characterized by the peculiar style of one of the two partners. We may feel emboldened to surmise that one of the authors is plainly responsible for the phrasing of this particular passage; and yet this very passage which seems to us so characteristic of one of the sharers in the enterprise may have been the result of the original suggestion of the other. Indeed, the major part of the invention of the whole, of the creation of character, and of the finding of situations may be due to the partner who did far less than the other in the mere setting down on paper of the results of the joint deliberations in the course of which the play took shape and form. For instance, it is believed that the actual writing of the Erck-

mann-Chatrian tales is to be ascribed to the pen of only one of the two partners, and yet the full share of the other in the stories signed by both has never been disputed.

If the work is truly the child of both parents the endeavor to discover the exclusive paternity of any special episode must be hazardous in the extreme. It is hopeless to seek to disentangle the specific contributions of the two collaborators when they have plotted and planned conjointly, and when each of them may have touched up the dialogue here and there in the scenes which the other happened to write. Who would be so bold as to risk a guess at the respective contributions of Augier and of Sandeau to the 'Gendre de Monsieur Poirier,' of Meilhac and of Halévy to 'Froufrou,' or of Reade and of Taylor to 'Masks and Faces'? It is not difficult to judge these partners by their work outside of this partnership and then to form an opinion as to what each of them individually brought to the undertaking; but these plays were all of them the result of true collaboration.

So far as our information goes, based on delicate and protracted investigation, the four plays which are not wholly Shakspere's are examples of both kinds of collaboration, the true and the false. Two of them, 'Henry VIII' and the 'Two Noble Kinsmen,' are the result of a genuine partnership between Shakspere and Fletcher, in which the two authors worked together in consultation over the construction and the characterization, even though they may have divided the actual writing of the successive scenes, in accordance with what seems to have been the custom then. The other two plays, 'Pericles' and 'Timon of Athens,' are examples of so-called collaboration in which the two writers are absolutely independ-

ent of each other, never meeting in consultation, the second of them merely amplifying, amending or injuring what the first had already composed without any expectation that it would ever pass into the hands of another playwright to be altered. At least, this is the supposition which seems best supported by such evidence as exists. Of course, no final opinion is possible, and any opinion must be based mainly on conjecture, or at best on inference.

II

In the middle of the nineteenth century James Spedding made a searching analysis of the style of 'Henry VIII,' and as a result he came to the conclusion that Fletcher was responsible for the majority of the lines. The cautious application of various tests convinced him that Shakspere had actually written only half a dozen scenes himself, and that the rest must be ascribed to the pen of Fletcher. One of the episodes of which Spedding deprived Shakspere and enriched Fletcher is that in which Wolsey bids a long farewell to all his greatness. Any opinion of so acute a critic as Spedding is entitled to great weight, and since he made this suggestion most commentators have been inclined to accept it. Many of them have gone so far as to receive Fletcher not only as the phraser of this scene, but also as its sole inventor. Yet there is no necessity for this extreme view; it is perfectly possible that the actual writing of this scene and of other important scenes may have been Fletcher's, even though the original invention of them might have been Shakspere's. If the play is due to a genuine collaboration, in which the two partners combined in building up the plot, then it is quite conceivable that scene after scene, in which a trained ear may

detect the manner and the vocabulary, the rhythm and the metrical effects characteristic of Fletcher, may nevertheless have been devised and outlined by Shakspere and turned over to the junior collaborator to be written out. On the other hand, it is possible, of course, that Fletcher invented those episodes as well as phrased them.

There is at least a little internal evidence to indicate that certain portions of the piece were composed under Elizabeth, despite the fact that the play was not produced until several years after the accession of James. That is to say, Shakspere may have begun to write another English history on the reign of Henry VIII which he laid aside for the moment, and there may have arisen later a demand for a play with abundant pageantry, whereupon he called in the aid of the younger Fletcher to do the most of the actual writing of the piece which he had himself earlier intended to complete. In talking over the plan with Fletcher the younger man may have made suggestions; he may have urged the inclusion of purely spectacular effects such as he was in the habit of employing when he was working with Beaumont; and in consequence of these conferences the original scheme of Shakspere may have been modified to meet changing conditions in the Jacobean theater.

No doubt, this is only conjecture, but conjecture is all that is left to us, since the play is plainly not wholly Shakspere, so far at least as its style is concerned, and since a goodly portion is almost certainly Fletcher's. But the conjecture here advanced finds support in a more or less parallel case in the life of Molière. What has here been suggested as the possible procedure of Shakspere was the precise procedure of Molière in a similar situation. Louis XIV asked Molière to prepare a play on a mytho-

logical plot in order to utilize certain magnificent sets of scenery not otherwise available; and Molière dutifully set to work to write 'Psyché.' He had plotted the play and drafted it in prose, as was his custom, he had even turned a few of the scenes into verse, when the impatience of the king forced him to call on others for help. Thereupon Molière engaged Quinault to write the lyrics; and he persuaded Corneille to versify what he had not been able to put into verse himself. Thus Corneille is responsible for the actual words, for the phrasing, of the whole play, excepting only the first act of the five and the opening scenes of acts two and three. But although it was Corneille who clothed with words most of the important situations, none the less is the whole play fundamentally Molière's, since it was he who had constructed the plot and who had conceived the characters. This we know, because Molière said it himself in his preface, published while Corneille was yet alive. And if this is the way in which Corneille came to be the collaborator of Molière, and if this was the division of the work between them, then it is perfectly plausible, to say the least, that the association of Shakspere and Fletcher may have been not unlike.

Whatever their respective shares in its authorship, 'Henry VIII' is not a play in which Shakspere could take pride, even if some of its episodes rise to a level of poetry and of psychology to which Fletcher scarcely could attain unaided. The piece returns to the early type of chronicle-play, in which the king from which it takes its title is not the most salient or the most dramatic character. In some of Shakspere's histories, 'Henry V,' for example, the appealing personality of the monarch serves to give a semblance of unity to the action; but in 'Henry VIII'

there is little attempt at coherence of construction. The interest is sustained by no central struggle; indeed, such interest as there may be is scattered over a variety of characters. The string of scenes shows us successively the fall of Buckingham, the fall of Queen Katharine, the fall of Wolsey and the threatened fall of Cranmer; and it strays aside to make us witness of the coronation of Anne and the christening of Elizabeth. It is a panorama rather than a play, a set of moving pictures rather than a drama. It brings forward a heterogeny of historic figures, only two of which really start to life, Wolsey and Katharine.

The story being more or less amorphous, its authors did not trouble to provide an alluring exposition; and the opening scene exists chiefly to permit a description of the Field of the Cloth of Gold, an epic passage which has little or no bearing on anything that is to follow. In like manner Buckingham's dying speech is wholly extraneous, even if it is a noble specimen of rhetoric. Wolsey looms large for a while, only to vanish in the second act; and his farewell speech, beautiful as it is in feeling as well as in phrasing, is not altogether in keeping with the character as it has been impressed upon us in the earlier acts, just as the Hermione of the final act of the 'Winter's Tale' is not quite consistent with the Hermione of the first act. Whether Fletcher wrote this speech of Wolsey's or not, it has the kind of psychologic inconsistency of which he was often guilty in the pieces that we know to be his.

The main attraction of the play in the actual playhouse must be sought in its abundant spectacular accompaniments. There are no single combats and no set battles like those with which Shakspere enlivened his earlier histories; but to make up for this abstinence there are half a dozen other devices for appealing to the eyes

and ears of Jacobean playgoers. In the first act there is a ball to which the king comes with his friends, unmasking to take part in the dance; in the second act there is the paraded pomp of a solemn state trial; in the fourth act there are the coronation procession of Anne and the contrasting dumb-show which peoples the perturbed dream of the stricken Katharine; and in the fifth act there is a meeting of the royal council, followed by the ceremony of the christening of Elizabeth. No spectator could deny that the promise of the prologue was kept:

> Those that come to see
> Only a show or two, and so agree
> The play may pass, if they be still and willing
> I'll undertake may see away their shilling
> Richly in two short hours.

III

The spectacular trappings of the 'Two Noble Kinsmen' are fewer than those of 'Henry VIII,' perhaps even fewer than in Shakspere's dramatic-romances, the 'Winter's Tale' and the 'Tempest.' Yet they are abundant enough, and they have evidently been inserted intentionally to captivate the eyes and ears of the Jacobean spectators who were now accustomed to expect these external effects. The play opens with Hymen and certain nymphs attending the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta; in the third act there is the prolonged duel of the two heroes; and in the fifth act there are three stately altars and three sumptuously appareled knights; and ingenious mechanical devices cause the vanishing of a hind from a blazing altar, the appearance of a rose-tree with a single rose, the falling of this rose, followed by the descending of the tree itself. There is also in the first act a battle off stage; and in the

fifth act there is, also off stage, the long combat of Palamon and his two comrades with Arcite and his two companions. The cries of this combat are overheard by the audience and its vicissitudes are reported to the characters on the stage, very much as Rebecca describes to Ivanhoe the changing fortunes of the fight he cannot behold with his own eyes.

There is a subplot setting forth the sentimental misfortunes of a jailer's daughter who goes mad in feeble imitation of Ophelia, and this subordinate action is useless, trivial and uninteresting. The main plot, dealing with the jealous rivalry of the two noble kinsmen, is unconvincing; it is not skilfully put together; and it is made possible only by a sudden flaming up of jealous passion, akin to the volcanic eruption of Leontes, and of a sort common enough in the earlier dramatic-romances of Beaumont and Fletcher. The characters are loosely drawn and highly colored; they are frequently inconsistent, and they are not vital enough to impress themselves on the memory. There is even an abhorrent absurdity in the attitude of the heroine, Emilia, apparently in love with both heroes equally and willing enough to marry either of them. Distinctly repulsive, because unwomanly, is her calm callousness when the one whom she has accepted is unexpectedly killed, whereupon she pairs off with the other at once, merely pausing to declare that the deceased bridegroom was

> A right good man; and while I live
> This day I give to tears.

Throughout the play there is a superabundance of high-flown eloquence, especially in the long-drawn discussions of the two toplofty heroes; and there is no reason to suppose that Fletcher was not responsible for all this. The

conduct of the contorted story and the summary psychology of the characters are also in accord with Fletcher's manner and method. But certain scenes are plainly not phrased by Fletcher; and these scenes were composed by another writer who was familiar with the plot as a whole, and who therefore probably had a share in its invention and construction. The action is artificial and unreal, but it is not falser to life or more arbitrary than the action of 'Cymbeline' or of the 'Winter's Tale.' It is perfectly possible that Fletcher's collaborator in the construction and his partner in the actual composition may have been Shakspere, even if the major share in the co-operative undertaking was taken by the younger man.

Yet it is difficult to believe that Shakspere, although he had descended to the level of Beaumont and Fletcher in dramatic-romances like 'Cymbeline' and the 'Winter's Tale,' and although he was here only helping out a friend in the making of a play for his own company, a play of a kind which then had an assured popularity—it is difficult to believe that Shakspere is necessarily the other writer who here aided Fletcher. Shelley, who was a keen judge of poetry, even if he lacked any special qualification for criticism of the drama, declared his disbelief in Shakspere's authorship of any word of it. It is true that Shelley seems to base this opinion partly on the fact that "the whole story wants moral discrimination and modesty"; and by this test Shakspere would be deprived of 'Cymbeline.'

If Shakspere was the unknown partner whose hand has been discerned in the 'Two Noble Kinsmen,' all that need be said is that he put very little of himself into the play. The few scenes which he may have penned are not marked by the soaring imagination or by the verbal magic which

he discloses in his own plays. And the play as a whole is devoid of the predominant characteristic of Shakspere as a dramatist, the imperishable vitality of the persons who people the story. In this play no single one of the characters starts to life under our eyes to linger in our memories as an unforgetable figure. And this negation could not be maintained in regard to any of the plays which we believe to be mainly Shakspere's own. Even 'Cymbeline,' the poorest of the pieces composed toward the end of his career, the least attractive in story and the most barren in character, has at least the captivating personality of Imogen, inferior to his finer heroines, no doubt, and yet possessed of a charm all her own.

IV

It is this special Shaksperian faculty of endowing chance figures with enduring reality that leads us to credit him with a share in 'Pericles,' which is otherwise as unworthy of him as the 'Two Noble Kinsmen.' A corrupt version of 'Pericles' was issued in quarto in 1609; but the play was not included in the First Folio of 1623, nor in the second. It does appear in the Third Folio of 1669, but in company with a group of other plays no one of which is now accepted as Shakspere's. Therefore this inclusion in the Third Folio carries very little weight in favor of Shakspere's having had a hand in it. The reason why he is credited with a share in it is chiefly because no other contemporary dramatist was capable of drawing Marina, and because many of the separate speeches seem to have the true Shaksperian quality. But even if we are forced to accept Shakspere as the writer of the second half of the play, there is no reason to suppose that he was a partner

in its original composition. The more obvious explanation is that he did no more than revise a piece planned and actually written by another playwright. That is to say, he improved it with many poetic embellishments and with many psychologic subtilties, just as he had improved in like manner the three parts of 'Henry VI.'

The starting-point of the story is a hideous instance of incest, unlikely to have attracted Shakspere at any time; and the sequence of events that trails along afterward is always as puerile as it is often ugly. Out of such stuff a viable play could scarcely have been made even by Shakspere himself when he was at the full plenitude of his power; and the unknown writer who originally sliced it into scenes left it lifeless, feeble and empty. There is no evidence of any dramaturgic skill; the story is loose-jointed and long-winded; it wanders wearily through time and space; in fact, it may not unfairly be described as a specimen of undramatic-romance. It is dilated by dumb-shows; and it has for its Chorus the poet Gower, who here plays the part allotted to the expositor in the medieval mysteries. These devices, the dumb-show and the expositor, were already outworn and archaic, long before the period when the play was produced; and they prove that the playwright who put the piece together had not kept pace with the advance in dramaturgic practice.

The exact date of the first performance of 'Pericles' is unknown or at least uncertain. It must have been previous to 1609, since the play was then published; and in the preceding year the piece had been novelized by Wilkins, an obscure writer, who had produced one or two other plays and who had been an actor in the company to which Shakspere belonged. The most probable explanation of the authorship of the play is that Wilkins

wrote it while he was a member of the king's company, and that Shakspere at the behest of his comrades took it in hand and tried to put some life into it. This supposition is confirmed by a careful comparison of the novel with the play, since we discover that Wilkins did not avail himself of those finer passages in the later acts of 'Pericles' which we believe to be due to Shakspere. Wilkins may even have prepared the novel after he had left the king's company and before Shakspere revised the play, which the original author had sold to the actors, parting thereby with all rights to it.

Yet the general conduct of the story is the same in the novel as in the play; and this points strongly to the conclusion that Shakspere accepted the complete plot of the original writer, that he made few or no structural changes, and that he confined himself to a rewriting of the most of the third, fourth and fifth acts, leaving the first and second acts very much as he found them and retaining the expositor and the dumb-shows. In other words, he is in no sense responsible for the puerile plot; and all that he did was to rephrase certain episodes as he found them ready made, incidentally giving life to Marina and to one or two other characters, and purging away a few of the grosser details which we may assume to have been in the original play since we find them in the novel. The more the play is studied the more likely this explanation appears; and if we accept it, we admit Shakspere was not a collaborator in the true meaning of the word. He did not halve the labor of invention and construction, and he did no more than touch up passages in the dialogue, modify here and there the motives, suppress now and again the fouler and more foolish accessories, and on occasion invigorate a character or two incidentally.

It is simply inconceivable that Shakspere at this stage of his career, careless as he might be and even perfunctory in his plotting, should have had any share in the slovenly construction of 'Pericles.' In 'Cymbeline' there is wasted effort on an ineffective series of situations; but at least the effort itself is evident, whereas in 'Pericles' there is no sign of any effort, effective or ineffective. All is lax and casual, except the mere writing and also the vitalizing of Marina. What Shakspere does with the dialogue was perhaps what he alone could do; but it cost him the minimum of effort. It was precisely what he stood ready to do at any time at the behest of his fellow-actors, whenever there happened to be a dearth of available material for their use. The demand for new plays was imperative and the supply was never equal to it. And to oblige his associates in the theater cost Shakspere little labor. It was a piece of task-work, no doubt, but it was not necessarily uncongenial, and for him it was easy. Style was his and stately rhetoric and abundant poetry; these things he could command at will and without strain, and they were at the service of his fellow-sharers for the asking.

The drama has ever its points of contact with the other arts; and what Sir Joshua Reynolds says about pictures is true also about plays. "There is nothing in our art which enforces such continual exertion and circumspection as an attention to the general effect of the whole. It requires much study and much practice; it requires the painter's entire mind; whereas the parts may be finished by nice touches, while his mind is engaged on other matters." In writing 'Pericles' Shakspere was only finishing the parts by nice touches, and this task did not engage his entire mind.

V

Of the four plays for which we cannot hold Shakspere wholly responsible 'Timon of Athens' is the one wherein we find his handiwork most indisputably evident. The piece has passage after passage that only he could have penned; and it is vitalized by one character, Timon himself, that only he could have carried through with the consistency and the power which distinguish it. Yet the piece contains not a few scenes which are repetitious, inconsistent and even contradictory, and these scenes are phrased with a flabbiness of style to which Shakspere never sank even in his most careless moments. The weaker episodes are more feebly written than anything in 'Pericles'; and the stronger scenes are more loftily written than anything in 'Henry VIII.'

In the parts of the play which we have good reason to ascribe to another author there is a constant shifting from prose to verse, and from blank verse to rime, for no artistic reason; and these parts are structurally excrescences upon the plot. The discrepancy between the work of Shakspere and that of the other author is unmistakable, and it is far more evident than in any other of the three plays here grouped together. In 'Henry VIII' and in the 'Two Noble Kinsmen' there are some speeches which might have been written by either Shakspere or Fletcher; but in 'Timon of Athens' we are very rarely in doubt as to the division of the scenes between Shakspere and the other author. The episodes which we assign to Shakspere are sealed with his sign-manual, and those which we must credit to the other writer are absolutely devoid of any Shaksperian quality. That is to say, the

other author was not a disciple or follower of Shakspere, borrowing his manner more or less skilfully as Fletcher was wont to do.

While there is substantial agreement among those who have investigated the subject carefully as to the division of the writing between Shakspere and his unknown partner in the enterprise, there is a frank divergence of opinion on the question whether Shakspere or the other writer is to be accepted as the original author to whom we must credit the plotting of the piece. Some there are who are inclined to the theory that Shakspere is here doing what he has done in 'Pericles,' revising and improving. Others, in increasing numbers, hold that Shakspere wrote the play himself, even if he may not have given it the final touches, and that his work was bedeviled by some unknown and very inferior writer. How Shakspere's manuscript may have come into the hands of this other author when the play was performed on the stage, if it ever was performed, and by what company it was acted, if by any—these are queries for which our present information affords no answer.

In default of external testimony, recourse must be had to internal. And happily the play as we have it, misprinted as it may be, provides helpful evidence. The ingenious analysis of Doctor E. H. Wright has disclosed the significant fact that if we drop out of 'Timon' all that we disbelieve to be Shakspere's there remains a play unduly brief, it is true, but coherent and consistent in plot, and this may be accepted almost as a proof that Shakspere was the original writer. Doctor Wright found further support for this view in a second significant fact, that all the material drawn from the several possible sources of the story—Plutarch and Paynter, Lucian and an earlier uni-

versity piece on the same theme—is contained in the Shaksperian part of the play, and that these several sources did not furnish any hints to the other writer who was guilty of the non-Shaksperian parts. The inference is irresistible that it was Shakspere who consulted the sources and who constructed the plot, and that the other writer may have cut out more than one scene that Shakspere had composed, making up for this by interpolating scenes due of his own.

Even when we disentangle the play which we are thus led to ascribe to Shakspere we do not discover a drama of high value. It contains the boldly painted figure of Timon himself, largely conceived and superbly handled, but it is thin in theatrical effectiveness. Macready declared that for the stage 'Timon' "was only an incident with commentaries on it"; and he asserted further that the story is "not complete enough—not furnished, I ought to say—with the requisite varieties of passion for a play; it is heavy and monotonous." It is a parable rather than a play; a satiric fable in dialogue rather than a drama. The proof of a play is in the performance, and 'Timon of Athens' has not been seen on the stage since a time whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary. And it is not only unfit for the theater, it is untrue to the facts of life; indeed, it is as distorted almost in its misrepresentation of humanity as the fourth part of 'Gulliver's Travels.' That any community of men and women anywhere or anywhen should be composed exclusively of ungrateful sycophants and of self-seeking flatterers is an extravagant exaggeration. Such creatures exist, no doubt, but there never existed any world of which they were the sole inhabitants.

Timon himself, for all his raving scorn, is not a truly

heroic figure, since he lacks common sense both in his philanthropic and his misanthropic moods. He is not a great character confronted by a great situation or set over against another great character, as Molière contrasted Alceste with Célimène. Indeed, Molière's handling of a pessimist is far sounder than Shakspere's. Molière may mean us to like his misanthrope, but he expects us also to laugh at him, because Alceste is a comic character after all, composed by the author for his own acting. Apparently Shakspere desired us to laugh with Timon and not at him, even if our laughter is as bitter as his own. And Molière avoids Shakspere's mistake of surrounding Timon by beings wholly despicable; the associates of Alceste are not all of them estimable characters, but they do not fall much below the average of humanity, if at all. "The magnifying of contrasts is prejudicial to truth and dulls the interest," as M. Jusserand asserts, adding that no one can feel much sympathy for so clumsy a benefactor of mankind as Timon, "first a machine for gifts, then a machine for insults, acting automatically, as bungling as he is proud, assisting the poor only by chance and usually enriching the rich, encouraging the cupidity of those around him, and offering himself as a plunder to all comers." The intense passion of his valedictory imprecations, the imaginative energy of the indictment he draws up against all mankind, these display Shakspere's incomparable power as a poet; but they must not blind us to the insufficiency of Timon as a character or to the inadequacy of the play in which he is the only sincere figure.

VI

In one of his letters Stevenson discussed the problem of literary partnership, and he insisted strenuously that the method he had adopted with his stepson was the only possible one—"that of one person being responsible, this one person giving the final touches to every part of the work." In the same letter he declared that the immediate advantage of true collaboration "is to focus two minds together on the stuff, and to produce, in consequence, an extraordinarily greater richness of purview, consideration and invention." It is possible that Shakspere and Fletcher focused their minds together on the invention of 'Henry VIII' and of the 'Two Noble Kinsmen,' but this seems a little unlikely; and certainly neither play discloses any extraordinary richness of purview, consideration and invention. It is possible again that Shakspere was the one person responsible for the final touches in every part of these two plays; but this again seems a little unlikely. And in the two other pieces in which we find Shakspere's work side by side with that of another writer we feel assured that the two minds were not focused together, and that one mind bettered in 'Pericles' and botched in 'Timon of Athens' what another mind had separately composed. How much or how little Shakspere may have contributed to 'Timon of Athens' or to 'Pericles,' to the 'Two Noble Kinsmen' or to 'Henry VIII,' may never be known.

Half a score other pieces have been attributed to Shakspere. Two or three of these were published in pirated quartos during his lifetime, with his name on the title-page. Half a dozen of them were actually included in the Third Folio; but this inclusion carries no weight whatever,

since this volume did not appear until 1664, long after the death of Heming and Condell, the editors of the First Folio. In one or another of these plays, in 'Sir Thomas More,' for example, it might be possible to pick out a passage or two in which there may be something of Shakspere's manner. But these passages are very few indeed, and they are discoverable only by the credulous. No one of the plays as a whole invites the belief that Shakspere was truly a collaborator in its composition. No one of these plays contains any character into which he has breathed the breath of life.

And this is the final test, for this life-giving faculty is the possession in which Shakspere is richer than any other dramatist since first men began to tell stories in dialogue and action. This faculty "that Shakspere received from nature overshadows all his other gifts," so M. Jusserand has finally summed up his supreme quality, "and makes us understand how, despite the changes of time, of schools, of literary ideals, despite an accompaniment of enormous defects (he did nothing by halves), his fame, in all lands, should have gone on increasing. It so happens that the quality usually the rarest is, in him, the predominant one; more than any poet of any time, he is a life-giver."

CHAPTER XX

CONCLUSION

I

That our information about Shakspere himself and about the facts of his life is as meager as it is may be a benefit to his fame, since our interest is now never distracted from the writings of the author to the doings of the man. Not a few poets, more particularly Shelley and Musset and Poe, have suffered an obscuration of their reputations by the very excess of our information in regard to relatively unimportant episodes of their biographies. In default of a surplusage of obtruding facts about their careers Sophocles and Shakspere and Molière force us to focus our attention steadily on their writings.

Shakspere did not himself publish any single one of his tragedies or comedies. Such editions of his more popular plays as were printed during his lifetime were unauthorized by him; and apparently they were piratical publications, mere catchpennies, hastily made up from shorthand notes taken in the theater or clumsily pieced together from the memories of disloyal performers. Under the English law as it was then, Shakspere had no redress against the pirate publishers, and we can only regret that their predatory enterprise did not move him to send forth himself complete and corrected copies of his manuscripts as the plays were actually acted in the theater. Despite Ben Jonson's assertion that Shakspere "never blotted out a line," it seems to be fairly certain that he was in the

habit of working over his plays and of amplifying them, perhaps for successive revivals and as the membership of the company was modified. At least we are justified in believing this from the fact that 'Hamlet' is far too long for the two hours' traffic of the stage, and that therefore the whole text as we have it now could never have been delivered at any single performance.

Shakspere, however, failed to issue his plays himself, whatever his reasons may have been, whether a desire to keep the true manuscripts in the sole possession of the company in whose takings he was a sharer or a disdain for any other appeal to the public than that of the playhouse; and in his ambitious youth Shakspere had sought literary reputation only from his narrative poems. Even the sonnets were not published by him or by his authority. 'Venus and Adonis' and the 'Rape of Lucrece' were printed with scrupulous scrutiny of the proofs; and the purity of the text of these narrative poems is in flagrant contrast with the corruption of the text of the First Folio edition of the plays, issued seven years after his death. Although we may find profit in a study of the quartos, the First Folio is, and must be always, our authority, in spite of its haphazard compilation and of its numberless blunders. So far as we can guess, it was printed mainly from the manuscripts in the theater, probably mangled by cuts carelessly made to meet the exigencies of performance and possibly contaminated also by occasional alterations and additions.

Certain of the plays are divided into five acts in the First Folio, although no act division has been indicated in such quarto piracies as may have preceded them; but we do not know whether or not this division into acts was due to Shakspere or to Heming and Condell, conforming

to a later fashion established by Ben Jonson. Certain acts of certain plays are further subdivided into scenes; and again we are left in uncertainty whether or not Shakspere had anything to do with this; it is now generally believed that he was in no wise responsible for it. The First Folio and many of the quartos also contain precious stage-directions and indications of stage-business, often omitted or changed in our modern library editions, but invaluable as evidence of the stage conditions to which the Elizabethan playwright had perforce to conform. While the division into acts and scenes, wherever it is attempted, is probably the work of the misguided editors, the stage-directions in the First Folio are almost positively due to the dramatist himself; and they therefore serve to bring us a little closer to him. The devoted zeal of a host of later editors and commentators has purged the text of the obvious misprints and has elucidated the meaning of many obscure passages. These editors have, however, allowed themselves the liberty of cutting up the acts into a succession of scenes, in accord with the several places where they supposed the action then to take place; and in so doing they have created a misleading and unnecessary confusion. But when all is said and when all allowances are made, we have little reason to quarrel with the situation in which we find ourselves now when we set out to see for ourselves just what it is that Shakspere did. There may still exist a few seeming inconsistencies and a few apparent contradictions; there may be painful gaps in our knowledge; but these are only a few and they are not important. After all, we have the plays, even if the text is not as solidly ascertained as we could wish; we have the histories and the comedies and the tragedies; and they speak for themselves, alike on the stage and in the study.

While we may not be possessed of all we want, we have all we need. We can weigh the plays themselves, and we can ask ourselves what manner of man he was who composed them. As Emerson asserted, "Shakspere is the only biographer of Shakspere"; and "we have really the information which is material, that which describes character and fortune, that which, if we were to meet the man and deal with him, would most import us to know."

II

"In all countries and in all ages a really fine play must be a rarity," Lewes declared, "since it is a work which of all others demands the greatest combination of powers. It is not enough for a man to be a great poet, a great inventor, a great humorist, it is not enough for him to have insight into character, and power of representing it in action, it is not enough for him to have command over brilliant dialogue and striking situation—there must be added to these a peculiar instinct for dramatic evolution, a peculiar art of construction and ordonnance which will combine all these qualities so as to meet psychological and theatrical exigencies. To be able to invent a story is one thing; to tell it dramatically is another; and to throw that story into the form of a drama is a third and still more difficult achievement."

That Shakspere possessed the peculiar quality of the playwright is generally acknowledged; and it is proved by the fact that his best plays still keep the stage after three centuries. That he did not always exercise this peculiar quality is more frankly admitted of late than it was a few years ago; and his occasional failure to exercise it is proved by the fact that more than half of his plays have been

unable to maintain themselves in the theater. He could climb to the loftiest summits of poetry with Sophocles, and he could also rival the cleverest ingenuities of play-making, such as are revealed by Scribe and Sardou, even if he does not always trouble himself to attain the deft adroitness of these latter-day craftsmen of the theater.

Sometimes he takes an unworthy story and fails to tell it dramatically. Sometimes he leaves loose ends, like the unmotived jealousy of Philip in 'King John' and like the promised retaliation upon mine host of the Garter in the 'Merry Wives.' Sometimes he credits his characters with his own foreknowledge and lets Malvolio act as though he believed Olivia to be in love with him before the character is told of it, as he also permits Oberon to anticipate the result of a blunder that Puck is to commit later. Sometimes he puts beautiful speeches into the mouths of uninspired characters and noble thoughts into the mouths of base creatures. He causes his villains to proclaim their own wickedness to the spectators, so that the least attentive of the groundlings might not be in doubt as to their future misdeeds.

Regularly he conforms to the traditions and the conventions which the Tudor theater had inherited from the medieval stage. The convention of the mysteries permitted several distant places to be set in view simultaneously, and therefore Shakspere puts the tent of Richard III by the side of that of Richmond. The tradition of the moralities authorized formal disputations, and Shakspere permits one character to state a case with eloquent amplitude, to be answered with ample eloquence by his opponent, hanging up the action, it may be, but providing the actors with the opportunity for oratory and gratifying the spectators with the vicissitude of debate. And as on

the medieval stage the action was presented on a neutral ground, which might be anywhere and which was identifiable as a specific place only when there was a necessity for localizing it, so Shakspere lets his story ramble through space, pausing for description only whenever there was need for letting us know where his characters are supposed to be. This was proper enough on the platform-stage of the Tudor theater; but it is not a little awkward upon the picture-frame stage of our modern playhouse.

But even when the playwright is lax in his practice the poet rarely slumbers. It is true, as Professor Bradley has pointed out, that there are "passages where something was wanted for the sake of the plot, but where Shakspere did not care about it or was hurried," and "the conception of the passage is then distinct from the execution, and neither is inspired." And the British critic appends the apt comment that Shakspere was "the greatest of poets when he chose, but not always a conscientious poet." Professor Bradley here suggests the distinct difference between Shakspere, on the one hand, and on the other, devoted technicians like Milton and Pope and Tennyson, who are never neglectful of the connecting-links and who are always scrupulous to bestow all possible finish even upon the least important passages. They are conscientious artists always; and Shakspere, greater than any of them when he exerts his full power, is occasionally disdainful of the meticulous care which they never failed to give. He exhibits a lordly carelessness as to the logical sequence of his figures of speech; and he does not hesitate to talk of taking up arms against a sea of troubles and of seeking the bubble reputation in the cannon's mouth. An affluent genius is likely to overflow with spontaneous images, sometimes inconsistent. The truly great poet is

not always a stickler for the niceties of metaphoric propriety, and he takes no pride in echoing the boast of an accomplished craftsman like Théophile Gautier, that his similes were always in accord with one another.

His style is not learned or conscious like Vergil's; rather is it instinctive like Goethe's, with little or no mannerism. His mastery of rhythm is marvelous; he abounds in fancy, and he can be superb in imaginative energy. In the most careless of his plays, the least plausible in story, the most loosely jointed in plot, the most perfunctory in character, the poet is continually coming to the aid of the playwright; splendor of speech dazzles us, and for the moment even blinds us to the deficiency of structure. With effortless ease he illuminates his nouns with the unforeseen but inevitable adjectives; and "one sentence begets the next naturally; the meaning is all inwoven," as Coleridge said. "He goes on kindling like a meteor through the dark atmosphere."

Like Molière, he never forgets the actors, and his speeches are all framed for oral delivery. The lines, however full they may be, are clear also; and the meaning constructs the rhythm. As Emerson pointed out, we have only to read for the sense, and we find ourselves in possession of the meter. Indeed, the ultimate beauty of many of his noblest passages can be fully appreciated only when they are apprehended by the ear; the eye alone does not capture all their charm.

His poetry is sustained and nourished by his comprehensive capacity for observation and reflection, two qualities rarely conjoined in equal degree. And in addition to the shrewd sagacity and buoyant wisdom that in him marks the exercise of these qualities, there is, as Bagehot pointed out, "a refining element of chastened sensibility

which prevents sagacity from being rough and shrewdness from becoming cold." His attitude toward life, toward his fellow-man, toward the insoluble problems of existence, is always healthy and never morbid. He is steadily sane, rarely bitter and never desperately misanthropic. "All through his works," to cite Bagehot once again, "you feel you are reading the popular author, the successful man; but through them all there is a certain tinge of musing sadness pervading and as it were softening their gaiety." However little he may have esteemed his plays, it is obvious that he enjoyed composing them. They have the spontaneity of creation delightfully accomplished, without fatigue and with profound satisfaction. Coleridge even went so far as to suggest that there are "scenes and parts of scenes which are simply Shakspere's disporting himself in joyous triumph and vigorous fun after a great achievement of his highest genius."

III

The lyric mood of etherealized idealism often points to despair; but Shakspere has ever a vigorous grasp on the wholesome realities of life. However much he may soar aloft, he can always recover his firm footing on the soil. He has a human earthiness such as we discover also in Montaigne; and this helps to keep his vision clear and large. He disdains the pettiness of so-called poetic justice, dear to Doctor Johnson and to other critics of his century. The innocent Ophelia and Desdemona die through no fault of their own; the deceived Othello kills himself; the insane Lear flickers out; and the wicked Macbeth is killed. Shakspere's good characters are often made to suffer, and, like Cordelia, they are sometimes doomed to

death, even if they have been allowed to survive in the story from which Shakspere is taking his plot. His bad characters sometimes escape without punishment, and on occasion they may even be married off—Proteus and Claudio and Angelo dismissed without even rebuke to a matrimony that should be a real reward. Shakspere has no word of reproach for Jessica's unfilial despoiling of Shylock or for Hamlet's wanton murder of Rosencranz and Guildenstern.

Medieval as he often is in his dramaturgy, he was never tempted to preserve the expositor who exists to point the moral of special deeds. He never preaches; and in no one of his plays can we discover any attempt to prove any particular thesis in the domain of ethics. He is never attracted to any anticipation of the modern problem-play. We can point out didactic passages here and there in his plays, the advice of Polonius to Laertes, for example, and the counsel of the Countess to Bertram; but these are only apt restatements of the eternal principles of conduct, sometimes warranted by the situation itself and sometimes thrust in for their own sake, because Elizabethan audiences had a keen relish for sermons. These passages of overt didacticism are infrequent and insignificant—at least they do not represent Shakspere's attitude toward the larger questions of morality.

This attitude, never defined by himself, has been stated fairly enough by Goethe. "I have never considered the practical result of my works. I am inclined to believe that they have done good, but I have never aimed at that. The artist is called on in his writings only to realize his idea. He takes on what aspect he may in the imagination of men; and it is for them to extract the good and to reject the evil. It is not the artist's duty to work on

the conscience. He has only to express his own soul." Shakspere has a soul to express, a soul far too large for the confining theory of poetic justice or for the needless task of declaring in set phrase the moral that may be drawn from his works. But the moral is there to be drawn by all who take the trouble to think. Shakspere's ethical doctrines are not formulated into precepts; they are not condensed into a code for instant quotation; but they exist, none the less, and they are immitigably sound. Shakspere does not believe that morality is something that can be put into a play; on the contrary, he holds that it is something that cannot be left out. With him, as with all true artists, morality is part of "the essential richness of inspiration," to borrow again the apt phrase of Mr. Henry James. He is moral and profoundly moral, because, like Sophocles, he "sees life steadily and sees it whole."

In a word his ethics are implicit rather than explicit; and we must discover in his dramas our own morality, each of us for himself. That is to say, he has as many morals as his plays have spectators; and we can find support in them as we can in the spectacle of life itself. His morality is not to be sought in specific instances; rather is it in the temper of the whole, in the sanity and the serenity with which he sets mankind before us as he sees it. His ethical influence is persuasive and abiding; he strengthens and he uplifts; he is never relaxing and emollient. He forces us to face the facts of life and to see ourselves as we are. By the conflicts he sets before us on the stage he nerves us for the struggles of existence. He himself is on the side of the angels, even if he is ever reminding us of the gorilla which lurks within us—the ancestral gorilla, selfish and bestial, avid of lust and of blood.

The outlook of Sophocles is sadder than that of Shakspere, and the outlook of Molière is far more sharply limited. By the very fact that Shakspere's imaginative energy is superior to Molière's his morality is at once richer and sterner. While it is not austere like that of Sophocles, it is not content to accept the precepts of the tolerant and disenchanted man of the world with which Molière is satisfied. Shakspere is larger than either the great Greek tragedian or the great French comedian; and because he himself is larger, so is his moral vision also at once broader and more penetrating.

Doctor Johnson, holding that "it is always a writer's duty to make the world better," decided that Shakspere is often derelict to his duty since "he sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct that he seems to write without any moral purpose." And here, for once, Johnson is right; Shakspere does write without any moral purpose. What the old-fashioned critic failed to see is that the ultimate morality of a writer does not depend on his purpose, but on his truth to life, and therefore finally on the sincerity of his vision. The corrective for this petty criticism of the eighteenth century is to be found in the ampler view never better stated in the twentieth century than by M. Jusserand. "For compelling hearts to expand, and making us feel for others than ourselves, for breaking the crust of egotism, Shakspere has among playwrights no equal. The action on the heart is the more telling, that with his wide sympathies the poet discovers the sacred touch of nature not only in great heroes, but in the humblest ones; not only in ideal heroines, but in a Shylock whom we pity, at times, to the point of not liking so completely 'the learned doctor from Padua'; 'even in the

poor beetle that we tread upon,' and we get thinking of its pangs 'as great as when a giant dies.' The fate of a Hamlet, an Ophelia, a Desdemona, an Othello, carries, to be sure, no concrete moral with it; the noblest, the purest, the most generous, sink into the dark abyss after agonizing tortures, and one can scarcely imagine what, being human, they should have avoided to escape their misery. Their story was undoubtedly written without any moral purpose, but not without any moral effect. It obliges human hearts to meet, it teaches them pity."

IV

In spite of the fact that it may be better for Shakspere's fame that we have so few details about his life and his personality, we cannot help regretting that we do not know more about the man himself; and we are tempted to pore over his works and to peer into them in the vain hope of catching sight of their author. Emerson, for one, was satisfied with the information which the plays supplied; and he asserted that "so far from Shakspere's being the least known, he is the one person, in all modern history, known to us. What point of morals, of manners, of economy, of philosophy, of religion, of taste, of the conduct of life, had he not settled?" On the other hand, M. Jusserand contends that "few dramatists have allowed less of their personality to appear in their works. What is mirrored in Shakspere's plays, apart from all that is eternal in them, is his time and his public, much more than his own self."

Yet these diverging opinions are not irreconcilable. Even if we had not external evidence, we should be justified in feeling that Ibsen had in a measure identified

himself with Stockmann, and that Molière was of a jealous temperament, because jealousy is the theme of a large proportion of his plays. Even if no single passion recurs again and again in Shakspere's plays, we can seize on a few at least of his dominant convictions; and even if there is in all his pieces no single figure for whom the playwright finds a model in himself, we may believe that we can catch successive glimpses of the author in the sympathetic portrayal of the young Romeo, of the more mature Hamlet, and of the tolerant Prospero. Beyond this we cannot go, for the dramatist does not put himself into his plays, even if he cannot keep himself out of them altogether. It is the function of the playwright to take himself out of the way and to let his characters speak each in his own fashion. No dramatist has ever drawn on his own early experiences as amply and as openly as the novelists have often done, as Dickens did in 'David Copperfield,' Thackeray in 'Pendennis' and Mark Twain in 'Tom Sawyer'; and there we have one of the fundamental differences between the art of the story-teller and the art of the playwright.

As a result of this professional attitude, and perhaps also of a personal reticence peculiar to Shakspere, we do not know his religion or his politics. We are in doubt whether he was a Roman Catholic or a Protestant, although we have some basis for believing that he did not like the Puritans, a lack of liking natural enough in a man practising a profession which the Puritans abhorred. There is little or no evidence that he had ever thought seriously about politics, although we can discover in his dramas a contempt for mob-rule and a conviction that a firm yet liberal government is best for the state. At least, the York-Lancaster histories and the Roman plays

seem to reveal Shakspere's appreciation of the immediate disadvantages of the disorder due to instability and to a doubtful succession to the throne. But if his religious beliefs and his political convictions are not clearly revealed to us, there are other beliefs of his and other convictions which do not admit of doubt.

He is ardently patriotic, for one thing, rejoicing that he was an Englishman and proud of the deeds of his fellow-islanders. Yet he is emphatically a landsman, with no liking for the sea, having ample realization of its dangers and scant appreciation of its beauty. He sets a high value on friendship between men. He has little feeling for home-life, for the intimacy of the hearth. He dislikes scolding wives; he warns men against marrying women older than themselves; and, although he gives us many noble portraits of women, he has not a single line in praise of the sex itself. Yet he apparently holds that the average woman would make a good wife—at least, we may infer this, since the bad wives who appear in his plays are very few indeed; even some of his bad women are good wives. From the frequency with which his women do not wait to be wooed, falling in love at first sight and frankly encouraging the men they have singled out, we may deduce Shakspere's opinion that women are readier to take the first step in love-making than is ordinarily supposed. Apparently also Shakspere does not despise a man who was attracted toward a woman primarily because she was wealthy.

If a truly great man is to be known by his contempt for money and for death, then we should be obliged to deny greatness to Shakspere. His plays confirm what we know also from legal documents, that he had a proper regard for money. And passage after passage suggests that he

had a shrinking horror of death, or rather of the corruption of the charnel-house. We can each of us decide for ourselves the precise weight to be attached to the significant fact that Shakspere is abundant in his references to sleep and endless in his eulogy of it. Equally significant are the frequent passages in praise of music, from which we may deduce the opinion that Shakspere himself delighted in it.

He is constant in belauding the horse, but he has never a good word for the dog, which he seems to have detested and despised. He has a distaste for both schools and schoolmasters. He also dislikes boy-actors, the rivals of his own company. He cannot contain his contempt for foppish courtiers, snobs and flunkies, never neglecting an occasion to jeer at them and to hold them up to scorn. On the other hand he has a high respect for kings, merely as monarchs. As might be expected, his mind is much occupied with the theater and especially with actors; and he is prone to use figures of speech drawn from the vocabulary of the stage, even when these are quite inappropriate to the person who utters them. Characters as dissimilar as Richard III, Hamlet and Othello draw unhesitatingly upon the technical terms of the contemporary English theater; and Cleopatra shrinks from the prospect of being inadequately personated by a squeaking boy.

On the other hand, he has scarcely a figure of speech drawn from the vocabulary of dramaturgy; that is to say, his plays prove that he was a player but they offer no evidence that he was a playwright—except their own existence. From the infrequency of allusion to books and authors, we may infer that he was not at all book-

ish, as Ben Jonson was. Evidently he was not a great reader, using books rather as tools for his immediate purpose than as friends for constant intercourse. He shows none of the predilections of a scholar; even if he had small Latin and less Greek, he always goes to the nearest translation of the classical authors. And even if he could read French, as M. Jusserand maintains and as seems more probable now that we know him to have resided in the house of a Huguenot, he approaches Montaigne in Florio's captivating translation.

Apparently Shakspere is wholly free from vanity founded on anything he had written for the stage. In the final twenty years of his life he makes no effort to come before the public as a man of letters. He seems to be like Scott in having no regard for literature as a high vocation. He writes plays as Scott writes novels, because that is the work nearest to his hand. Like Scott again, he does not hold himself called upon always to do his best and always to make his work as good as it could be made. He is not incessant and conscientious in striving to attain perfection; and he attains it only now and again. He enjoys what he does, no doubt, but does not overvalue it; and, as Sir Leslie Stephen suggested, he holds that "the defeat of the Armada was a more important bit of work than to amuse the audience at the Globe." Yet he is ever interested in amusing the audiences of the Globe, partly because it is always interesting to do that which we know we can do well, and partly because of the solid reward to be reaped by success. To him as to Scott the life of a man of letters is less alluring than the life of a country gentleman. And how it was that a man of these tastes and of these beliefs

should have written 'Hamlet' and 'Othello,' the 'Merchant of Venice' and 'As you Like it,' the Falstaff plays and the plays from Plutarch, must ever remain one of the insoluble mysteries of genius.

NOTES ON THE MAPS

WITHOUT attempting to decide questions of precise location which perhaps are insoluble, I have endeavored to mark approximately the position of every place in London with which Shakspere's name can be connected either historically or traditionally. On the ordinance map these could be found wherever the locality has been recorded with any degree of accuracy, or could be discovered by patient collation of every accessible map either before or since that of 1573. In many of these the sites of vanished buildings can be traced by such names as Playhouse Yard, Cockpit Alley, etc. To-day even these have in many cases disappeared before "the march of improvement." Where the precise situation is unknown I have outlined in red the general district, as in the case of St. Helen's, Bishopgate, or the site of Salisbury House in the Whitefriars. When we come to Höfnagel's map of 1573 the matter ceases to be so easy. There is no scale to guide us and the distances between and relations of one building and another are so general and inaccurate that, after careful research and comparison of all the maps from that day to this on which I could lay hands, I am not at all certain of more than the general position of many of them. The sites concerning which I am principally in doubt are those of the Theater and the Curtain in Shoreditch, together with that of St. Leonard's Church, which it is odd is not indicated as are most other churches extant at that period. The old precinct of the Blackfriars Monastery was from the date of its suppression by Henry VIII until the great fire of 1666 in such a continual state of change that it is only because of its relation to the Church of St. Andrew that I am able to indicate the position of Shakspere's house there at all; it is shown more precisely in the ordinance map.

While our debt to Professor Wallace for his publication of the information extracted largely from the Loseley MSS. is great, his account of the sites of this dwelling of Shakspere's and of

the Blackfriars Theater is so confused and out of harmony with the indications of the great sixty-inch ordinance map of London that my utmost patience has failed to co-ordinate them. Other traditions have, however, placed the theater where I have shown it—to the south of Playhouse Yard. Few of the sites on the 1573 map may be absolutely exact, but a comparison of the two maps will give them more nearly and serve to indicate the difficulties of which I have spoken.

E. H. B.

1. St. Leonard's, Shoreditch. Tarleton and J. Burbage buried there.
2. The Theater, in King John's Court, Holywell Lane, Shoreditch.
3. The Curtain, in Curtain Road at Hewitt Street ('Romeo and Juliet' produced there 1596), formerly Curtain Court.
4. The Fortune, in Golding (now Golden) Lane, between Rose Alley and Black Swan Court, in the block between Playhouse Alley and Roscoe Street.
5. The Red Bull, in St. John's Street, Clerkenwell, on the site of Hayward's Place, in Woodbridge Street, north of Aylesbury Street.
6. Shakspere's lodging, in the house of Montjoy, at the northeast corner of Silver and Mongewell Streets.
7. The Bull Inn, in Bishopgate Street.
8. St. Helen's, in Bishopgate Street. A W. Shakspere is said to have lived in the precinct, possibly not the poet.
9. The Cross Keys Inn, in Gracechurch Street, below Leadenhall.
10. The Boars Head Tavern, in Eastcheap, at the corner of Gracechurch Street, where now stands the statue of William IV.
11. The Mermaid Tavern, in Cheapside, between Bread and Friday Streets, with access to all three.
12. The Bell Savage Inn, outside Ludgate, between the old Bailey and Farringdon Streets, on the north side of Ludgate Hill.
13. The Bell Tavern, in Carter Lane, on the south side, between Addle Hill and Godliman Street.
14. The Blackfriars Playhouse, in Playhouse Yard, Blackfriars, where the "Times" publishing office stands.

15. Shakspere's house, in St. Andrew's Hill, Blackfriars, nearly at the south corner of Ireland Yard.
16. St. Mary Overies, now St. Saviour's, Southwark. Edmund Shakspere buried there.
17. The Whitehart Tavern, in High Street Borough, on the east side, a little to the south of Bedale Street.
18. The Bearbaiting, on Bankside.
19. The Globe, on Bankside, now within the premises of Barclay and Perkins' brewery.
20. The Bullbaiting, on Bankside, in Bear Gardens.
21. The Rose, in Rose Alley, north of Park Street, Southwark.
22. The Falcon Tavern, Bankside, in Falcon Wharf Alley.
23. The Hope, in the curve formed by Holland Street, opposite the Falcon.
24. The Swan, under the present roadway of Blackfriars Road, where Holland Street debouches.
25. Gray's Inn Hall.
26. Middle Temple Hall.
27. The Great Hall, Whitehall, on the south side of Horseguards Avenue, at the angle under the present Board of Trade Buildings.
28. The Cockpit or Phœnix, in Cockpit Court, between Bow and Russell Streets, Covent Garden.
29. Paul's, in the Choir Singing School, near the Convocation House, St. Paul's. The Chapter or Convocation House stood about where the cross is on the ordinance map.
30. The Whitefriars, in old granary at the lower end of the back yard of Salisbury House, Whitefriars.

The Newington Butts, in Ames Place, formerly Playhouse Yard, between Clock Passage, Swan Place and Hampton Street, Newington Butts, is not shown on the map for lack of space; to do so would have unduly reduced the scale and the site is not very certain.

Inn signifies an hostelry in the yard of which it is recorded that plays were acted.

Tavern, an inn of which no such record exists, but which is in other ways connected historically or traditionally with Shakspere.

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